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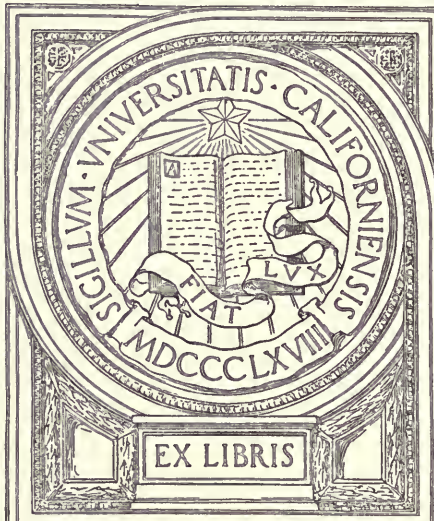

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WITH SWORD AND CRUCIFIX

EDWARD S VAN ZILE

THE RED-LETTER SERIES

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With Sword and Crucifix.

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With Sword and Crucifix

How Louis de Sancerre, the Companion of Sieur de la Salle on the Mississippi, found his love.

AN AMERICAN ROMANCE BY AN AMERICAN WRITER NAMED

Edward S. Van Zile

The illustrations were drawn by
ARTHUR I. KELLER

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WITH SWORD AND CRUCIFIX

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A GREAT EXPLORER LISTENS AT MIDNIGHT TO A TALE OF LOVE

"Louis le Grand, King of France and Navarre, has deserted pleasure to follow piety—and times are changed, monsieur."

The speaker, Louis de Sancerre, of Languedoc, descendant of a famous constable of France, leaned against a tree near the shore of a majestic river, and musingly watched the moonbeams as they chased the ripples toward an unknown sea. A soft, cool breeze, heavy with the odor of newborn flowers, caressed his pale, clear-cut face, and toyed with the ruffles and trappings of a costume more becoming at Versailles than in the mysterious wilderness through which its wearer had floated for many weeks.

On the bank at the exiled courtier's feet lay reclining the martial figure of a man, whose

stern, immobile face, lofty brow, and piercing eyes told a tale of high resolve and stubborn will. Sieur de la Salle, winning his way to immortality through wastes of swamp and canebrake and the windings of a great river, had made his camp at a bend in the stream from which the outlook seemed to promise the fulfilment of his dearest hopes. On the crest of a low hill, sloping gently to the water, his followers had thrown up a rude fort of felled trees, and now at midnight the adventurous Frenchmen and their score of Indian allies were tasting sleep after a day of wearisome labor.

De la Salle and a hapless waif from the splendid court of Louis XIV., more sensitive than their subordinates to the grandeur of the undertaking in which they were engaged, had felt no wish to slumber. They had strolled away from the silent camp; and, for the first time since Count Louis de Sancerre had joined the expedition, its leader had been learning something of the flippant, witty, reckless, debonair courtier's career.

"Beware the omnipresent ear of the Great Order, Monsieur le Comte!" exclaimed La Salle, rising to his elbow and searching the shadows behind him with questioning eyes. "Think not, de Sancerre, that in the treacherous quiet of this wilderness you may safely speak your mind. I

have good reason to distrust the trees, the waters, and the roving winds. Where I go are ever savages or silence, but always in my ear echoes the stealthy footfall of the Jesuit. And this is well, monsieur. I seize this country in the name of France; the Order takes it in the name of God!"

"In the name of God!" repeated de Sancerre, mockingly. "You know Versailles, monsieur? There is no room for God. Banished once by a courtesan, the Almighty now succumbs to a confessor."

"Hold, monsieur!" cried La Salle, sternly. "This is blasphemy! Blasphemy and treason! But enough of priests! You tell me that you loved this woman from the court of Spain?"

"How can I say? What is love, monsieur?" exclaimed de Sancerre, lightly, throwing himself down beside his leader.

It was as if a butterfly, born of the moonbeams, had come to ask a foolish riddle of the grim forest-glades. The incarnation of all that was most polished, insincere, diabolical, fascinating at Versailles had taken the form of a handsome man, not quite forty years of age, who reclined at midnight upon the banks of an unexplored river, and pestered the living embodiment of high adventure and mighty purposes with the light and airy nothings of a courtier's tongue.

How should Sieur de la Salle know the mystery of love? He who had wooed hardship to win naught but the kiss of disappointment, he who had cherished no mistress save the glory of France, no passion but for King and Church, was not a source from which a flippant worldling could wring a definition of the word of words.

The majestic silence of the night was broken by the raucous muttering of some restless dreamer within the confines of the camp. An owl hooted, and far away a wolf bayed at the moon. La Salle arose, climbed the bank to see that his sentries were attentive at their posts, and then returned to Count de Sancerre's side.

"You do not answer me, Sieur de la Salle!" exclaimed the latter, testily. "I have sought the answer from La Fontaine, from Molière, Racine; aye, from Bossuet and Fénelon. 'Twas all in vain. They were men, you say, and did not understand? But I have asked the question of de Montespan, la Vallière, la Fayette, Sêvigné. One was witty, another silent, and all were wrong. There remained, of course, de Maintenon. Her I never asked. She would have said, I doubt not, that love is a priest who leads by prayer to power."

"You wander far afield, Monsieur le Comte," remarked La Salle, coldly, after an interval of

silence. "The night grows old, and still you have not told me why you left the splendors that you love, to risk your life in this fierce struggle in an unknown land."

"To risk my life?" cried the Count, laughingly. "If that were all! To tear my velvets where no draper is, to see the gay-plumed birds a-laughing at my plight, to long in vain for powder for my wig, to find my buckles growing red with damp—all this is worse than death. But still, I bear it bravely, do I not? Ah, well, Turenne—God rest his soul!—taught me the lessons of a hard campaign. What is this voyage in a bark canoe upon the peaceful breast of yonder stream? A pleasure-jaunt, monsieur, to one who fought with France against the world—who sheathed his sword at Nimeguen. Once only were we beaten, de la Salle. The Dutch let in the sea, and, lo! his Majesty and Luxembourg, Turenne and Condé, Vauban and the rest, were powerless against the mighty ally of the foe. I say to you, Monsieur le Capitaine, beware the sea! You seek it in your quest. 'Tis full of treachery."

The Count had arisen and drawn his sword, which gleamed in the moonlight as he turned its point toward the unknown mouth the roving river sought.

"This blade," he said, reseating himself and patting the steel with affection, "flashed gayly

for the King upon the Rhine. Alas for me, it drove me at the last to seek my fortunes in a weary land."

"You drew it, then, for something other than the cause of France?" remarked La Salle, suspiciously.

"For that of which we spoke, which no tongue voices but all hearts have felt. I drew it once for love—*et voilà tout!*"

"You killed a Spaniard, then?"

"They speak the truth, monsieur, who say your mind is quick. She—as I told you—came to France with Spain's great embassy. He, a strutting grandee, proud and bigoted, came with the suite, holding some post that made his person safe. The tool of diplomats, the pet of priests, my rival—as he was—defied my hate. 'Tis said they were betrothed, Don Josef and— But hold! her name I need not speak."

The Count remained silent for a time, watching the moon-kissed waters at his feet. La Salle, grim, reticent, but not unsympathetic, gazed steadfastly at his companion's delicately-carved face. A stern knight-errant, who sought to win an empire for his king, lay wasting the midnight hours to listen to a love-tale from a flippant tongue.

"'Twas with this blade," went on de Sancerre after a time, waving his sword from side to side in the moonlight, "that I pierced his heart—and

broke my own. For which all praise be to Saint Maturin, who watches over fools."

"He was no coward, then?" questioned La Salle.

"Not when his pride was pricked," answered de Sancerre. "Great wars have been begun with less diplomacy than I employed to make my insult drive him to his steel. But, Spanish blood is hot, and, truth to tell, my tongue can cut and thrust. Her eyes were on us at a *fête champêtre* when, standing by his side, I spoke the words that made him mine at midnight — 'neath a moon like this. There's little left to tell. He knew a Spanish trick or two, but, monsieur, he was a boy! In the moonlight there his eyes were so like hers I lost all pity—and—so—he died."

"And then?"

"And then I vowed a candle to St. Christopher and sailed across the sea. Breathe it not, monsieur — I bore a letter from de Montespan to Frontenac."

"Then cut your tongue out ere you tell the tale," exclaimed La Salle, gruffly. After a moment's silence he went on, more gently: "But, Monsieur le Comte, I cannot understand the ease of your escape. You've roused the anger of the King, de Maintenon, the Jesuits, and Spain. Such foes could crush an empire in a day."

"But you yourself, monsieur, have stood against them all."

"I?" exclaimed La Salle, musingly. "You may be right, my friend. I sometimes wonder if my life is charmed. Whom can I trust, monsieur? Allies false when the hour of danger came, assassins at my bedside, and poison in my food—all these I've known, monsieur. And still I live."

The two adventurers had arisen and were facing each other in the moonlight. La Salle, tall, commanding—a king by the divine right of a dauntless soul—stood, with head uncovered, looking down at the slender, graceful patrician confronting him.

"You strive for France, Sieur de la Salle," exclaimed de Sancerre, the mocking note gone from his voice—"for the glory of dear France—and France will not destroy you."

"For France!" repeated La Salle, solemnly. "For France and for the Church! *Vive le Roi!*"

Silently they turned and, mounting the hillock, made their way toward the sleeping camp, while the Mississippi rolled on beneath the moon to tell a strange tale to the listening waters of the gulf.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE IS CONFRONTED BY A MYSTERY

Like a statue done in bronze stood Chatémuc before a hastily-constructed hut at the rear of the log fort in which the rank and file of the explorers lay sleeping. La Salle had chosen the sentry as his special body-guard, for at many a critical juncture in his long years of exploration —menaced at all times, as he had been, by a thousand lurking perils—the daring Frenchman had tested the loyalty and courage of this stalwart Mohican, who, for love of a white man, had wandered many weary miles from his tribal hunting-grounds.

Within the rude but spacious hut over which the phlegmatic Indian stood guard lay sleeping, as La Salle and de Sancerre entered the enclosure, two men who had found rest upon heaps of leaves and grass, and whose strangely-contrasted outlines, emphasized by the errant moonbeams that penetrated the chinks between the logs, called attention to the curious mixture of

unrelated nationalities of which La Salle's expedition was made up. In one corner of the hut reclined the slender form of the Franciscan friar, Zenobe Membré. Upon his placid, smiling face —a countenance suggestive of religious enthusiasm even while he slept—rested a ray of silvery light, as if the prayer that he had uttered ere he fell asleep had transformed itself into a halo to glorify his pillow through the night. His thin hands were crossed upon his breast, and showed white and transparent against the gray background of his garb.

Within the shadows at an opposite corner of the apartment lay the lithe, muscular figure of a man whose costume made it difficult for the observer to determine whether the wearer was a foot-soldier from the Low Countries or a Canadian *coureur de bois*. The truth was that Henri de Tonti's experiences as an Italian officer in the Sicilian wars had left their impress upon his attire as an explorer under de la Salle. As he lay, fully dressed, in the moonlight that night he might well have been a sculptor's dream, representing in his outlines the martial genius of the Old World, bringing "not peace but a sword" to the New. A bare hand rested lovingly upon the cross-piece of his rapier, which he had unfastened from his waist and tossed upon the dry grass of his couch. His other hand was covered by a glove.

Before they threw themselves upon their tempting beds of leaves, La Salle and de Sancerre stood side by side in the centre of the hut for a moment, gazing thoughtfully at the weird tableau that their slumbering comrades made.

"The sword and crucifix!" whispered de Sancerre, pointing from the soldier to the priest. "Strange allies these, monsieur."

"But one without the other were in vain! They serve together by the will of God. Goodnight, Monsieur le Comte."

How long de Sancerre had slept before he was awakened by a light touch upon his shoulder he never knew. It must have been a considerable time, for, as he opened his reluctant eyes, he saw that the moonlight no longer gleamed in all quarters of the hut, but dimly illumined only one corner thereof. Inured though he was to perils of all kinds, the Count felt a thrill of dismay as his eyes rested upon a hideous, grinning face leering at him from the shadows close at hand. He sat up hurriedly, uttering no sound, but fumbling in the leaves and grass for his rapier. A glance assured him that his comrades had been undisturbed by the intruder at his side.

"Be not afraid, señor," whispered a voice in

broken Spanish. "The children of the moon have naught to fear from us."

De Sancerre, to whom Spanish was like a native tongue, raised himself upon his elbow and gazed searchingly at the misshapen hag who had disturbed his sleep.

"I crave your pardon," he murmured, with the air of a courtier addressing a coquette in the Salon de Venus, while the mocking smile that his face so often wore gleamed in the half-light. "Then I am of the children of the moon?"

"At night ye come from out the shadows of the distant lands, ye white-faced offspring of your Queen, the Moon. The Sun, our God, has told us you would come. Be not afraid. We have rare gifts for you—and loving hearts."

The harsh, guttural voice in which the aged crone spoke these gentle words added to the uncanny effect of her wrinkled, time-marked face, peering at the smiling Frenchman through the gloom.

"I bring you this," she went on, still speaking in a mongrel Spanish patois, which de Sancerre found it difficult to interpret. "Remember what I say. The children of the sun send greeting to their brothers of the moon."

She laid upon the dried grass of his bed a piece of white mulberry bark, upon which de Sancerre's eyes rested indifferently for an instant.

When he raised them again the hag had left his side, and he saw her pushing her way through an opening in the tree-limbs at the further end of the hut. For an instant her diminutive body stopped the gap in the wooden wall. Then, from where he lay, the Frenchman could catch a glimpse of moonbeams on the river through the opening that she had made.

For a moment this strange visitation affected de Sancerre unpleasantly. Surrounded, as their little party was, by unknown tribes with whom the wily Spaniards had had intercourse, the words of the old crone, cordial though they had been in their way, filled the Count with alarm. Furthermore, the ease with which she had made an undiscovered entrance to their hut emphasized the disquiet that he had begun to feel. Thorough soldier as he was, this seemingly harmless invasion of his leader's quarters became to his mind a more menacing episode the more he weighed it in all its bearings.

Rising noiselessly from his resting-place, de Sancerre made his way between his sleeping comrades to the entrance to the hut. Stepping forth into the white night, he confronted Chatémuc, who still stood motionless in the same spot that he had occupied when La Salle and his companion had returned from the river. The Mohican, from long service with the explorer, had

acquired a practical knowledge of the French tongue, but, as a general rule, he made use of it only in monosyllables.

"Chatémuc," said de Sancerre, sternly, "your eyes are heavy with the moonlight or with sleep. You keep indifferent guard. Did you not see an aged witch who even now stood within the hut and roused me from my sleep?"

The tall Mohican gazed down upon the Frenchman with keen, searching eyes, which glowed at that moment with a fire that proved him innocent either of treason or stupidity. His stern, immobile face gave no indication of the astonishment which the Frenchman's accusation must have caused him.

"There's nothing stirring but the river and the leaves," said Chatémuc, with grim emphasis, turning his shapely head slowly to sweep the landscape in all directions with eyes for which the forest had no mysteries.

"*Ma foi*, my Chatémuc! You're as proud and stubborn as de Groot, the Hollander. But follow me. I'll show you a hole that proves I dreamed no dream."

De Sancerre, behind whom stalked the stately Mohican, made his way hurriedly to the further side of the hut. Pointing to an opening between the logs, through which a small boy might have crawled, the Count said:

"Behold, monsieur, the yawning chasm in your reputation as a sentry! 'Twould not admit an army, but it might serve for a snake."

Chatémuc had fallen upon his knees, and was examining the aperture and the trampled grass which led to it. Presently he arose and turned towards the Count.

"A woman," he muttered. "Small. Light. Old."

"Fine woodcraft, Chatémuc! You read the blazonry that crossed the drawbridge with great skill—after the castle has been captured. But let it pass. No harm's been done, save that your pride has had a fall. And so I leave you to your watch again. If you loved me, Chatémuc, you'd keep old women from my midnight couch. I fear my sleep is lost."

Stealing noiselessly past the motionless forms of La Salle, the friar, and the Italian captain, after his successful demonstration of Chatémuc's negligence as a sentinel, de Sancerre approached his tumbled bed of leaves with weary step. A feeling of depression, a sudden realization of the horrid possibilities that his environment suggested, a sensation of impotent rebellion at the fate that had hurled him from the very centre of seventeenth-century civilization into the rude embrace of a horror-haunted wilderness, came suddenly upon the vivacious Frenchman, mocking

at his stoical views of life and making of the satirical tendency of his mind a knife with which to cut himself.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he muttered, as he gazed down upon the dry grass and leaves of his uninviting couch, "these be fine lodgings for a Count of Languedoc! At the worst, with Turenne, there was always Versailles at our rear."

At that instant his heavy eyes lighted upon the slip of white bark which his recent caller had left with him as a token of good-will. De Sancerre bent down and, grasping the seemingly meaningless gift, gazed at it inquiringly. To his amazement, he made out in the darkness what seemed to him to be a bit of writing, scratched with a pointed instrument upon this fragment from a mulberry bush. Hastily, stealthily, making his way to the opening through which the donor of the gift had forced her exit, the Count leaned forward, and in the moonlight read, with wondering eyes, the name:

Julia de Aquilar

It was the name of the woman for love of whom he had killed a Spaniard and lost his native land. Instantly his mind harked back to the confession that, but an hour or so before, he had poured into the ears of Sieur de la Salle. Had an eavesdropper overheard his words, and, in a

spirit of mischief, sought to tease him by a trick? He rejected the supposition at once, for the conviction came upon him, increasing a thousandfold the consternation which he felt, that he had deliberately refrained from mentioning the name of his inamorata to La Salle.

De Sancerre drew himself erect and stood motionless for a moment, the most amazed and startled being in all that strange new world.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A MAIDEN SHOWS HER HEART

Sieur de la Salle's temporary stockade had been erected upon the western bank of the great river, and his followers had received with delight the report that their leader had decided to indulge in a few days of recuperation before continuing his journey to the gulf. After weeks of labor at the paddles, the canoemen were in sore need of rest. The party consisted of twenty-three Frenchmen, eighteen Indians—Abenakis and Mohicans—ten squaws, and three pappooses. Discontent and even open grumbling had already developed in this incongruous assemblage, and it was only the stern, imperious personality of de la Salle that had saved the expedition from falling asunder through the inherent antagonisms of the elements of which it was composed.

But upon the morning following the Count de Sancerre's receipt of an inexplicable gift from the children of the sun there reigned an air of gayety in the camp. Provisions were plentiful, the terminus of the exploration, it was rumored,

was near at hand, and, for the next few days, at least, no exhausting task, no menacing danger seemed likely to annoy the adventurers. The glories of early spring upon the lower Mississippi met their wondering and grateful eyes. In his delight the Frenchman carolled forth a *chanson* to greet the rising sun, while his phlegmatic comrade, the native American, grunted with satisfaction as he reclined upon the long grass and appeared to muse indolently upon the strange vivacity of the men from oversea.

Shortly after dawn de Sancerre, pale, heavy-eyed, restless, weary of his vain efforts to gain a dreamless sleep, had wandered away from the camp and thrown himself listlessly down upon the gently sloping shore of the river, across whose ripples flashed the gleaming arrows of the April sun. As he lay there, reclining against a slender tree-trunk, the last few hours seemed to him to have been a long nightmare, through which the mocking black eyes of a woman of wondrous beauty had taunted him for his helplessness.

As de Sancerre, refreshed by the cool breeze that chased the sunbeams across the flood, recalled every detail of his recent adventure, he found himself confronted not only by a mystery, but by a choice between two courses of action which must be made at once. Should he tell his

comrades of the strange episode that had disturbed his rest, or should he keep the secret to himself, trusting to Chatémuc's pride and reticence to repress the story of the night? In a certain sense he was under obligations to de la Salle to keep him informed of every happening which, even remotely, might affect the welfare of the expedition. On the other hand, there was that in his leader's personality which caused de Sancerre to hesitate before telling him a tale which, he reflected, would sound like the ravings of a lunatic. He could picture the cold, disdainful glance in de la Salle's searching eye ere he turned upon his heel with the curt remark that the Count de Sancerre's dreams should test the friar's skill.

To the Count, thus vexed by a most disturbing problem, came Katonah, sister of Chatémuc, the only Indian maiden in Sieur de la Salle's strangely-assorted suite. With the most punctilious courtesy de Sancerre sprang erect, removed from his head his travel-worn but still picturesque bonnet, and, making a sweeping bow, pointed to the grass-grown seat that he had just vacated.

"Mademoiselle Katonah, I bid you welcome! I was dreaming, *petite*, of the land across the sea. Your eyes and smile shall change my mood again."

The Indian girl gazed at the Frenchman with

dark, fearless eyes, in which there gleamed a light that told the courtier a tale he had no wish to learn. Not that the Count was better than his age, more scrupulous than the pleasure-loving court in which his youth had been passed, but in the freer, nobler atmosphere of this brave New World, and in the companionship of men striving in the midst of peril to do great deeds, all that was most admirable in de Sancerre's character had been born anew, and, to his own amazement, he had learned that his views of life had undergone a change, that there had grown up something in his soul which gave the lie to his scoffing tongue, still from habit the tongue of a *mondain* fashioned in an evil school.

Katonah, reclining against the tree and gazing upward at the Frenchman, formed a deep-toned picture becoming to that land of hazy sunlight, drowzy zephyrs, and opening flowers, bright-hued and redolent of spring. Her dark eyes, clear-cut features, and white, even teeth, her slender, supple limbs, satisfied even the exacting eye of a man who had looked with admiration upon La Vallière, de Montespan, de Maintenon.

"The land across the sea!" exclaimed Katonah, waving a slender, well-turned hand toward the opposite shore of the great river. "You would go back to it?" She had learned the French tongue from her brother, Chatémuc.

Her eloquent eyes rested questioningly upon the pallid, symmetrical face of de Sancerre.

The barbaric directness of her question brought a smile to the Frenchman's lips as he threw himself down by her side and took her hand in his.

"Mayhap some day I shall go back, *ma petite.* But at this moment I have no wish to go."

De Sancerre was looking at Katonah, but in his mind was the picture of a scrap of white bark upon which had been scrawled the name of the only woman his heart had ever loved. Perhaps Katonah weighed his words at their real worth, for she withdrew her hand from his, while her gentle eyes rested mournfully upon the mighty river upon whose bosom she had learned the joy and sorrow of a hopeless love.

De Sancerre, whose delicately-moulded face, graceful figure, ready wit, and quick perceptions, added to high birth and a reputation for physical courage, had made him a favorite at a voluptuous court, felt a mixture of self-satisfaction and annoyance at the unsought homage that he had won from this handsome savage. No coquette at Versailles could have put into artful words the flattery that Katonah gave him by a glance. But de Sancerre realized that, under existing circumstances, her devotion to him might involve them both in serious peril. Her brother, Chaté-

muc, was a sentry whose eyes and ears would not always be blind and deaf to what was stirring besides the river and the leaves.

"Katonah," said the Count, presently, "let me tell you why I may never go back to the land beyond the sea."

The Indian girl gazed up at him with earnest attention.

"To the great wigwam of the king who rules all kings there came a maiden from a distant land. Her eyes were like the night, her hair the color of a raven's wing."

De Sancerre met Katonah's eyes and remained silent for a time. There was something in her glance that chilled him for the moment with an inexplicable foreboding. Annoyed at his weakness, he went on:

"All men loved her, *ma petite*, and so it was not strange that I— *Mais n'importe.* Among the braves, Katonah, who followed in her train was a youth with evil eye, a black, soft-footed, proud, and boastful man, to whom her word was sworn."

"You killed him, then," said Katonah, with conviction.

De Sancerre started nervously and gazed around him searchingly. There was an uncanny precipitancy in Katonah's mental methods which affected him unpleasantly.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "I killed him, Katonah."

"And the maiden with the raven hair? You carried her away?"

"No, Katonah. I came across the sea and left her there."

The eyes of the Mohican wore a puzzled expression as she tried to read his face.

"I do not understand," she murmured, presently.

De Sancerre remained silent for a while. He realized that, with the limited vocabulary at his disposal, he could not make the Indian girl comprehend the exigencies which, in a civilized land, might arise to drive a lover from his loved one's side. The mind of the savage maiden was unfitted to grasp those finer distinctions which made the habits and customs at Versailles so superior to the methods and manners prevailing among her Mohican kindred. Presently the expatriated courtier said:

"Katonah, let me tell you a strange tale. Your brother kept guard last night between the river and our hut. But while we slept an aged woman crept up beside my bed and gave me this."

De Sancerre removed from his breast the piece of mulberry bark upon which rested the name of Julia de Aquilar. Katonah gazed at the writing awe-struck.

"It is the name," said the Frenchman, in answer to her glance, "of the woman with the raven hair."

The Indian girl, with marvellous grace and agility, sprang to her feet. Motionless she stood for a moment looking down at de Sancerre.

"She followed you across the sea?" she asked, in a dull, passionless voice.

De Sancerre smiled as he slipped the bark into his doublet and rose to a standing posture.

"That could not be, Katonah," he said, lightly. "I think some wizard, making medicine, has read her name upon my heart."

More he might have said, but at that instant Chatémuc, with stormy brow, stood beside them. Not glancing at the Frenchman, his angry gaze rested upon the shrinking figure of Katonah. With an imperious gesture he pointed towards the camp, and, as the girl hurried away in obedience to her brother's silent behest, de Sancerre threw himself wearily upon the bank, a mocking light gleaming in his eyes as he turned and watched the retreating Mohicans until they were lost to sight behind the osier-trees.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH DE LA SALLE REACHES A FATEFUL DECISION

"I HAVE heard it said that the good Father le Jeune, the Jesuit, not speaking Algonquin, was obliged to expound the mysteries of the faith to the Montagnais through the aid of a blasphemous backslider, far gone in liquor. This tool of Satan put vile words into the mouth of the Jesuit, so that the Montagnais laughed mockingly while le Jeune fondly thought that he was explaining to them the doctrine of the Trinity."

Henri de Tonti, Zenobe Membré, and Sieur de la Salle had joined the Count de Sancerre, after the departure of Chatémuc and Katonah, and the quartet had formed itself for the time being into a council, to answer at once an insistent and momentous question. Two white-robed envoys, carrying a disk of burnished copper to represent the sun, had entered La Salle's hut an hour before this, bringing to him an invitation to visit, with his followers, the city of their chief. Henri de Tonti, enthusiastic lay proselyter though he

was, had taken the ground that an expedition to the haunts of the sun-worshippers would result in nothing more valuable than a waste of time and energy, while it might involve the party in unforeseen dangers. To check the enthusiasm of the Franciscan friar, who longed to convert these friendly idolaters to the true faith, de Tonti had just been calling the attention of the council to the difficulties besetting a missionary who attempted to explain the teachings of Mother Church in a tongue with which he was not thoroughly conversant.

The slender, white-faced friar, whose great physical endurance was suggested by nothing in his outward seeming but the clear, steady gleam in his large gray eyes, turned, rather impatiently, from the Italian adventurer and put forth an appealing palm towards Sieur de la Salle, who lay at full length upon the bank, his head resting upon his upturned hand, as he listened attentively to the debate between the soldier and the priest.

"There is much efficacy in signs, monsieur," exclaimed Membré, with fervor. "Could I have led a thousand redmen to a knowledge of the truth had I always waited for an alien tongue? When all seemed lost, when their ears were deaf, when my prayers and hymns were but the feeble strivings of a voice they would not heed,

has come a miracle, vouchsafed by Jesus Christ, and howling savages have fallen prone in penitence before the cross. I ask not much of you, monsieur, but in the name of Mother Church I crave an escort to these children of the sun. To pass them by, to leave them hopeless in their blind idolatry, to say no word to bring them to the faith—Mother of God, but this would be a sin!"

The delicate face of the Franciscan glowed with the fervor of his soul. He had drawn himself up to his full height, and his rich, penetrating voice echoed weirdly across the gleaming waters of the flood.

De la Salle put up his hand with a gesture seemingly intended to calm the exuberance of the devoted priest. Turning to de Sancerre, who was seated on his right, he said:

"What think you, Monsieur le Comte? Shall we risk a visit to these children of the sun?"

"*Mais oui, monsieur.* There is no other course. If they should take offence at our neglect—*ma foi*, it might go hard with us."

A scornful smile played across de Tonti's scarred and rugged face. He was annoyed at his failure to prevent the delay which this apparently useless visit to a pagan tribe would engender. De Sancerre observed the satirical expression upon the Italian's countenance, but

wisely refrained from giving voice to the anger which he felt at the sight. Between de Tonti and de Sancerre a national antagonism had been intensified by the jealousy existing between them regarding the attitude of their leader. The evident fondness shown by de la Salle for the companionship of the itinerant French nobleman had displeased the Italian veteran, whose long years of devotion to the explorer's service had begotten a claim to special consideration. In more highly civilized surroundings the friction between de Tonti and de Sancerre would long ago have found relief in bloodshed. One striking difference between Versailles and the wilderness lay in the fact that in the latter greater provocation was needed to impel men to run each other through with steel than in the parks in which gay courtiers insulted one another with soft words.

"Furthermore, monsieur," went on de Sancerre, observing that his words had not impelled de la Salle to come to an immediate decision regarding the question at issue — "furthermore, there may be a way to find an interpreter through whom these lost idolaters shall learn the teachings of our faith." If there sounded a note of insincerity in the Frenchman's voice, none marked it save de Tonti, whose smile was always satirical when de Sancerre touched upon the Church.

"Your words, Monsieur le Comte, mean much or nothing. Explain yourself," said de la Salle, coldly.

"Did you notice at the further end of yonder hut a hole through which a good-sized dog might crawl?" asked de Sancerre, impressively, arising and pointing toward the camp.

"Sieur de la Salle has eyes for everything, Monsieur le Comte," remarked de Tonti, tauntingly.

Paying no attention to his rival, de Sancerre went on:

"Through that hole last night there crept into the hut an aged hag, who, coming to my side, gave us a welcome from the children of the sun. They call us—as you know—the children of the moon."

De la Salle, calm, phlegmatic, but ever on the alert, gazed searchingly at the speaker.

"Your tale is somewhat late, monsieur," he remarked, meaningly.

"I feared the gossip of an idle camp," said de Sancerre, lightly, carelessly tossing a pebble into the rippling waters at his feet. "The matter's not of moment but for this: the old crone spoke a Spanish *patois*, hard to understand, but not impossible. Her tongue, I think, might serve our friar well."

"A Spanish *patois?*" repeated de la Salle,

musingly. "'Tis well you spoke of this, Monsieur le Comte. I told the keen-eyed Colbert that there was no time to lose. Below, around us lie the lands of gold, and stretched across them rests the arm of Spain. The time has come when we must lop it off."

De la Salle had arisen and, with his hand upon the hilt of his sword, gazed toward the waters which flowed toward a Spanish sea. He looked, for the moment, the very incarnation of the martial spirit of an adventurous age, bidding defiance to a mighty foe. Suddenly he turned and eyed his followers sternly. In a voice which admitted of no reply, he said:

"De Tonti, de Sancerre, and Membré, prepare to set out at once to these people of the sun. I'll give you presents for their chiefs and wives. Send Chatémuc to me. He shall go with you, and his sister—Katonah, is it not? She'll find the woman with the Spanish tongue where you, as men, might fail."

"But," exclaimed de Sancerre, springing to his feet, "there may be peril for the girl in this. 'Tis best we go alone."

"I am amazed, Monsieur le Comte," remarked La Salle, sternly. "Obey my orders! 'Tis not for you to question what I plan. Whatever comes of this, the blame shall rest with me."

De Tonti, Membré, and de Sancerre had turned to make their way hurriedly back to the camp.

"De Sancerre," called La Salle, ere they had gone beyond ear-shot. The French nobleman returned hurriedly to his leader's side.

"There is no danger to Katonah in all this," said La Salle, meaningly, his eyes reading de Sancerre's face. "No harm can come to her, for Chatémuc is ever by her side. No nobleman in Spain or France is prouder, de Sancerre, than Chatémuc. You understand me?"

"*Ma foi*, I am not dull, monsieur!" exclaimed the Count, a note of anger in his voice. Then he turned on his heel and strode rapidly toward the camp.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH A DAUGHTER GRANTS A FATHER'S WISH

LATE in the afternoon of a day in April, just one year before the date of the occurrences recorded in the foregoing chapters of this tale, Don Rodrigo de Aquilar, statesman, soldier, scholar, devout Catholic, sat at a curiously-carved table in the library of his ancestral house in the street of Las Palmas, Seville. His gray hair and pointed beard, his keen, dark eyes and lofty brow, the simple elegance of his attire, and the artistic luxury of his surroundings combined to form a striking picture in the half-lights of the waning day. Upon the table before him lay pompous tomes, quaint old manuscripts, and several crude maps and charts.

Copies of the letters of Menendez to Philip II. of Spain, made by Don Rodrigo in the archives of Seville; a transcript of the bull "by the authority whereof Pope Alexander, the sixth of that name, gave and granted to the Kings of Castile and their successors the regions and islands found in the west ocean sea by the navi-

gations of the Spaniards;" a reproduction of a map of the western world, dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney by Michael Lok; a volume entitled *Hakluyt's Divers Voyages*, hot with hatred of the Spanish, and other misleading data concerning a misunderstood continent confronted the Castilian aristocrat, and by their united efforts cast upon him a spell which had brought to his thin cheeks a hectic flush, and to his haughty lips lines of determination.

It was, however, with a much later manuscript than any one of those above mentioned that Don Rodrigo was engaged at the moment of which we write. Bending eagerly forward from a quaintly-cut, high-backed chair, the aged Spaniard was scanning attentively a parchment upon which a recent explorer, with artistic tendencies, had inscribed a pictorial outline of his discoveries. Ports, harbors, islands, and rivers competed for the attention of the observer with rudely outlined birds, beasts, and fishes. Indians feasting and dancing, Indians flogged by priests, Indians burning alive for heresy, gave grim testimony to the fact that the eccentric cartographer had witnessed sympathetically the saving of souls in the New World. It was not upon these, however, nor upon the chameleon with two legs confronting a bat-winged griffin having the tail of an alligator—a weird product, according to the map-

maker, of Mexico—that Don Rodrigo de Aquilar was squandering the retreating light of day. His eyes and mind rested upon a sketch representing a group of Indians working silver mines.

"Methinks, Juan, the venture's worth the risk. Were it not for Doña Julia, I'd slip my anchor of old age and sail across the sea. I have no mind to place the King's gift in an agent's hands, to let him rob the Mexicans and me."

Don Rodrigo had leaned back in his chair, and was gazing across the disordered table at a pale, dark-eyed youth, attired in black velvet, whose thin, nervous hand had been making a copy of letters - patent from Charles of Spain to his Majesty's "dear beloved son in Christ, Don Rodrigo de Aquilar." Juan Rodriquez, secretary to Don Rodrigo, was a lineal descendant of a *marinero* of Seville who had returned safely to his native city after circumnavigating the globe with Magellan. Of this same *marinero* it had been written that he was "energetic, courageous, but marvellous unprincipled."

"I have heard Doña Julia say, señor," remarked Juan in a softly modulated voice—"I have heard her say, within the last few days, that she would be glad to see those strange lands over-sea, where palaces are made of gold and pearls grow upon the trees."

A grim smile played across the haughty countenance of the old statesman.

"An idle whim begot of idle tales, young man! But were I sure that sufferings and danger would not beset our ship, I'd take the girl and look upon my grant before I die. 'Twill be her heritage at last. But, look you, Juan! These blind cartographers have dealt in fancies tempting men to death. Somewhere beneath the soil of yonder fatal land lie my two sons—and in my death a famous name must die. And I am old. They'd say at court, should I set sail from here, that his Majesty's rich gifts had made me mad at last."

There was silence at the table for a time. Don Rodrigo reclined in his chair and watched the changing lights and shadows of the waning day as they emphasized the sombre beauty of the room. Presently he said:

"You've made the footings, Juan? A hundred thousand ducats will cover everything?"

"And leave a handsome margin, señor," answered the secretary, referring to a parchment upon which daintily-executed rows of figures had been inscribed. "As times go, señor, the vessel costs you but a song."

Don Rodrigo eyed Juan Rodriquez searchingly. His secretary's apparent eagerness for the venture mystified him. Diplomatist, educated

in a crafty school, the old Spaniard had never lost sight of the advantages to be gained at times by frank directness.

"You are urging me to take this step, Juan. Let me ask you why?"

The pale face of the youth had turned yellow in the twilight. His dark, shifty eyes refused to meet his master's insistent gaze. His thin hand drummed nervously on the dry, rattling parchment in front of him as he said, with an attempt at candor which did not ring true:

"I believe, señor, that it would be well for Doña Julia, and for you, to leave Seville for a time. She mourns Don Josef — does she not? And you, Don Rodrigo, have won a triumph in diplomacy that frees you for a while from public life. The voyage now is not so fraught with danger as of old, nor is there peril when you reach New Spain. More than one fair lady of Seville has been across and back for love of Mother Church. And, as I said, the marvels of the sea might serve to turn your daughter's mind from thoughts of her betrothed."

Don Rodrigo gazed earnestly at the eager face of his secretary.

"You believe, then, Juan, that Doña Julia's heart was broken when Don Josef fell, run through by the Frenchman's sword? You think she loved him?"

"Nay, señor, such thoughts are not for me," answered Juan, in a voice that resembled the purring of a cat. "But this I see—that since you returned from France her eyes are heavy and her cheeks are pale. The songs she used to sing we hear no more. She's fading like a flower which craves the sun. Give her, señor, new aims, new scenes, the splendors of the sea, the marvels of New Spain, and once again her eyes and smile will be as sunny as they were of old."

"You're wise beyond your years, young man," remarked the old diplomat, playfully. "Mayhap, my Juan, you know a charm to make me young again. Or perhaps you can find the island of Bimini and the fountain of eternal youth which bold de Leon sought. But, hark, I hear her step! We'll lay the venture, in all its bare simplicity, before her, and do as she decides."

As Don Rodrigo ceased speaking there entered the library a dark-haired, large-eyed, graceful girl, who glided from the shadows of the twilight toward the centre of the room, and stood motionless at the lower end of the long table. A belated sunbeam, stealing through the distant window, caressed her face for a moment, upon which a sad smile rested as her eyes met her father's.

"You disobey his Majesty's behest, Don Rod-

rigo de Aquilar!" she exclaimed, playfully, pointing toward the books and maps before her. "Did not the King command you to take a well-earned rest, my father?"

"But his Majesty has never ordered me to sit here and die," remarked Don Rodrigo, emphatically. "Be seated, Julia. You come to us at a most opportune moment. For my services in France his Majesty has granted me fair lands across the sea. Mines rich in silver belong to me by virtue of this seal. The question is, my daughter, will you go with me to view my province in New Spain?"

Juan Rodriquez, who had arisen upon Doña Julia's entrance, stood watching the girl with stealthy eyes, in which there gleamed a light not there before. There was silence in the room for a moment. Then Julia, looking Don Rodrigo fearlessly in the face, said:

"I will go with you gladly, father. Seville has stifled me. But place no faith upon my changing whims. If we're to go, then let us sail at once."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH JUAN RODRIQUEZ UNDERGOES AN UNPLEASANT HALF-HOUR

In the year 1681 the fickle Guadalquivir still pursued a liberal policy toward Seville and vouchsafed sufficient water to that port to enable sea-going vessels to begin or end their voyages within sight of the Alcazar. Later on, the Spanish sailors were forced, by the treachery of the famous river, to abandon Seville and betake themselves to Cadiz for an ocean harborage.

At the time, however, at which Don Rodrigo de Aquilar fitted out the *Concepcion*—a high-pooped vessel of ninety tons burden—for his voyage to the silver mines bestowed upon him by Charles II. of Spain, the harbor at Seville enabled the aged diplomat to equip his ship without leaving his library. By giving his orders to his secretary, Juan Rodriquez, who carried them to Gomez Hernandez, captain of the *Concepcion*, Don Rodrigo was relieved of the friction which in those days frequently soured

an adventurer's disposition even before he had put to sea.

The necessity for haste, lest the veering winds of Doña Julia's fickle fancy should at the last moment balk her father's enterprise, had been impressed upon Juan Rodriquez, who needed no hint from Don Rodrigo to make him a gadfly to the captain of the *Concepcion*. Long before he weighed anchor, Gomez Hernandez had sworn by his favorite saint that if the opportunity ever came to him to put the white-faced, soft-voiced secretary into irons, he would show him no pity. That the perilous voyage before them might furnish him with the means for punishing Juan's insolence the captain well knew. Let the *Concepcion* toss the Canaries well astern, and for many weeks Gomez Hernandez would be autocrat in a little kingdom of his own.

Doña Julia's cabin was, as it were, the hawser which held the clumsy little ship to her moorings. A stuffy room between decks, it seemed cruel to ask a maiden used to the luxury of Seville, Madrid and Paris to spend weeks within its irritating confines. Don Rodrigo had devoted great energy and ingenuity to the task of making his daughter's quarters aboard ship less repulsive than they had at first seemed. Rugs from the Orient, a hammock made of padded silk, jars of sweetmeats from Turkey, a price-

less oil-painting of the Virgin Mary, and other quaintly contrasted offshoots of a fond father's anxious care combined to make Doña Julia's cabin a compartment whose luxury was ludicrous and whose discomfort was pathetic.

Had Don Rodrigo de Aquilar better understood the peculiarities of his daughter's disposition, he would have spent less time in making of her cabin a mediæval curiosity-shop, and would have weighed anchor a week sooner than he did—thus gaining a span of time which would have begotten across the sea a radical difference in the outcome of his expedition. Something of this found its way into the mind of the aged Spaniard after the *Concepcion* had cleared the mouth of the Guadalquivir and was standing out to sea. Beside him upon the poop-deck stood Julia, her dark eyes gleaming with excitement as they swept the tumbling sea or glanced upward at the bulging sails which drove the awkward craft haltingly across the deep. She had paid little or no attention to the cabin which had taxed Don Rodrigo's ingenuity, Juan's patience, and Captain Hernandez's temper for a month; but the flush in her cheeks and the smile upon her lips, as she watched the waters sweeping the Old World away from her, gladdened her father's heart as he scanned her changing face.

"The sea is kind to us. See yonder rainbow

'gainst the purple east! An omen such as that is worth a candle to St. Christopher."

The soft, insistent voice of Juan Rodriquez broke in upon the musings of the grandee and his daughter.

"'Tis not so strange the saints should wish us well," remarked Don Rodrigo, removing a black velvet cap from his head to let the sea-wind play with his white locks. "We go to serve the work of Mother Church. To tell the heathen of Mary and her Son, to raise the cross where blood-soaked idols stand, to fight the devil with the Book and prayer."

"And, then—to work the mines," put in Juan gently.

Doña Julia turned quickly and flashed an angry glance at the soft-tongued secretary. She had noticed, with annoyance, a change in Juan's manner since the ship had steered for the open sea. In a way that defied explanation in words, the young man had carried himself for the past few hours as if, upon the deck of a ship, he had found himself upon an equality with his master. There was an elusive sarcasm in his words at times, a defiant gleam in his restless eyes, a mocking note in his voice, which the girl noted with an inexplicable feeling of foreboding.

"Aye — to work the mines," repeated Don Rodrigo, unsuspiciously. "Why not? 'Tis nigh

two centuries since treasures from New Spain came over-sea. And for their paltry gold we've given them the cross. For every ducat gained by Spain, a soul's been won for heaven. Harsh measures with the stubborn — these, of course. 'Tis thus the Church must win its way on earth. The fight is not yet done. Upon the border of the lands I own the good Dominicans have built a mission-house. On you, my daughter, will devolve the task to raise a great cathedral where the friars dwell. I'll dig the silver from the ground for you, and mayhap from my place in paradise the saints will give me eyes to see the glory of your deeds. May Mother Mary will it so!"

The old man's eyes were upturned in fervor toward the changing glories of the evening sky. The excitement of the embarkation, the enlivening influence of the stiff, salt breeze, and the mysterious promises held out to him by that seductive West toward which his vessel plunged had stirred the blood in the aged Spaniard's veins, and emphasized at the same moment both his religious enthusiasm and his earthly ambitions.

Doña Julia was on the point of commenting upon her father's words when there sprang to the deck from below a slender, active man who, ashore, would have looked like a sailor, but aboard ship resembled a soldier. Gomez Hernandez, captain of the *Concepcion*, was the very

incarnation of that dauntless spirit which had, within the lapse of two centuries, carried the arms of Castile and Aragon to the farthest quarters of an astonished globe. Bright, dark eyes, a cruel mouth, a small, agile, muscular frame, and a manner proud or cringing as occasion dictated, combined to make of Gomez Hernandez a typical Spanish seaman of the seventeenth century. Saluting Don Rodrigo de Aquilar respectfully, the captain said:

"May I trouble you, señor, to join me in my cabin for a while? I have matters to lay before you which brook no delay."

Hernandez's words were addressed to the diplomat, but his piercing eyes rested as he spoke upon the face of Juan Rodriquez. The secretary, even paler than his wont was, gazed across the sea toward the horizon from which the shades of night had begun to creep.

"Await me here, Julia," said Don Rodrigo, cheerfully, turning to follow the captain to the lower deck. "I will return to you at once. Lead on, my captain. You'll find I am not mutinous, no matter what you ask."

In another moment Doña Julia and Juan Rodriquez stood alone upon the poop. The secretary turned from his contemplation of the sea and his restless eyes fell full upon the disturbed face of the girl, a face of marvellous beauty in the half-

lights of the fading day. There was silence between them for a time. The creaking of timbers, the complaining of the cordage, the angry splash of the disturbed sea, and from the bow the subdued notes of an evening hymn, sung by devout sailors, reached their ears.

"Señora," said Juan, moving toward Doña Julia, "I have much to say to you—and there is little time. If my words to you should seem abrupt, the blame lies with my tongue, not with my heart. If that could speak, you'd find me eloquent indeed. I—"

With an imperious gesture, Doña Julia checked his speech. Her symmetrical, somewhat voluptuous, mouth was curved at that moment in a smile of disdain.

"Spare me—and spare yourself, Juan Rodriquez," she said, coldly, turning her back to the sea and facing squarely the youth, whose eyes met hers with a glance of crafty defiance not unmingled with an admiration that filled her with loathing. "You say more only at your peril. I'll forgive you your presumption—once. But take good heed of what I say. If you address me in such words again, it shall go hard with you."

A grayish pallor overspread Juan's face in the twilight. A cruel smile played across his thin lips, and his hand grasped a railing at his side as if it would crush the stubborn wood.

"THE CAPTAIN HURLED HIM DOWN UPON THE DECK."

"You threaten me, Doña Julia de Aquilar," he murmured, showing his teeth in an evil smile. "You know not what you do. See how our ship is driving toward the murky blackness of the West. Think you I shall be powerless beyond? I say to you, señora, that you, your father, and all you hold most dear, are in the grasp of Juan Rodriquez—your servant in Seville, your master in New Spain."

He had seized the girl's wrist and was gazing into her white face with vindictive, hungry eyes. She wrenched her arm free from his repellent grasp, and, drawing herself up to her full height, gazed haughtily at the boastful youth.

"What mad fancies there may be in your mind, Juan Rodriquez, I cannot guess. But this I know: if I should breathe a word of what you've said into my father's ears, you'd lie a prisoner between the decks. And he shall know of this, unless you swear to me to leave me to myself, to speak no word to me, to keep your eyes from off my face, my name from off your lips."

The threatening smile upon Juan's mobile face had changed to a spiteful grin while the girl was speaking.

"Your love for Don Rodrigo would be weak, indeed, should you, señora, speak a word of this. I tell you, Doña Julia, your father's in my grasp. I'll show him mercy—but I make my terms with

you. 'Tis no mad fancy, nor an idle boast," went on Juan, making a significant gesture toward the slashed velvet upon his breast, "which you have heard from me. I know my power. If you are wise, you'll take my word for this."

There was a calm, convincing note in Juan's voice that froze the rising anger in Doña Julia's veins. She knew the crafty nature of the man too well to believe that he would thus threaten her unless he had gained possession of some weapon for the working of great mischief. In mute dismay she stood for a moment gazing helplessly at the gray, grim waters which seemed to yawn in hunger for the tossing ship. Suddenly she felt an arm around her waist, and turning quickly found the flushed face of the youth pressed close to hers. An exclamation of mingled disgust, anger, and fear escaped her.

At that instant the strong, nervous hand of Gomez Hernandez seized Juan Rodriquez by the neck. With an ease which his slight figure rendered marvellous, the captain twisted the youth like a plaything in his grasp, and then hurled him, full length, prone upon the deck.

"I crave your pardon, señora," said Hernandez, with cool politeness, bowing low to Doña Julia, "but Don Rodrigo requests your presence in his cabin."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH JUAN RODRIQUEZ TAKES HIS REVENGE

The voyage of the *Concepcion*, thus inauspiciously begun, continued with fair weather upon the sea and squalls threatening aboard the ship. Doña Julia spent much time in her oddly-equipped cabin; Don Rodrigo, impatient of delay, fretted at the tedium of the passage and paced the poop restlessly for hours at a time. Between Juan Rodriquez and Captain Hernandez a sullen truce was maintained for several weeks succeeding the incident recorded at the end of the foregoing chapter. But Juan had neither forgotten nor forgiven the insult which he had received at the hands of the relentless navigator. He awaited, with the patience of a crafty schemer, an opportunity to avenge himself upon the man who had turned his melodramatic declaration of love into an undignified farce.

A Carmelite friar, who had begged passage to Hispaniola from Don Rodrigo, discovered, after a time, a radical change in the disposition manifested by the heterogeneous crew toward his

white frock and all that it represented. In so far as the discipline of Captain Hernandez permitted open grumbling, the sailors grew outspoken in their protests. The good priest, who had found the crew devoted to their beads at the outset of the voyage, was unable, as the weeks went by, to persuade the sailors to put their grievance into words. Nor was he able to keep them at their prayers or to lead their voices in quaint old Latin hymns. There was in the ship a mysterious, elusive influence which had convinced the impressionable, superstitious seamen that the vessel was accursed and that somebody aboard ship, being in league with Satan, was able to nullify the effects of their religious observances. Thus it was that the sweet-faced Carmelite labored in vain to restore before the mast the devout atmosphere which had prevailed among the crew while the coast of Spain still lay but a few miles astern.

Matters grew worse aboard the *Concepcion* after the white friar had been put ashore at the Indies and the clumsy vessel had begun to beat up the Gulf of Mexico against baffling headwinds. The sailors whispered to each other that the desertion of the Carmelite had left the Prince of Darkness in full control of the ship. To a crew composed in large part of Spanish desperadoes, with a sprinkling of Portuguese cutthroats,

it was not easy to restore an atmosphere of religious fervor after it had once been destroyed by evil tongues. Experienced as he was in the fickleness of the half-savage sailors who in those adventurous days manned the omnipresent ships of Spain, Captain Hernandez witnessed with grave concern the gradual abandonment by his crew of its religious attitude and the increasing tendency of the sailors to imply, either by word or manner, that Mary and the saints had abandoned the ship to a cruel fate.

To Julia de Aquilar the voyage had become a seemingly interminable imprisonment. The elation which she had felt at the outset of the cruise had never returned to her after the depressing episode which had aroused in Juan Rodriquez a deadly hatred for the captain of the ship. The girl had caught the gleam of murder in the secretary's eyes as he lay out-stretched upon the deck gazing upward at Gomez Hernandez, and in her cabin, as she tossed restlessly in her hammock, her mind grew sick with a foreboding which waxed more insistent as the weary days and nights crept by. Now and then she would climb the clumsy ladder to walk the deck for a while, but the dread of finding herself again alone with Juan Rodriquez made her shy of this diversion. Don Rodrigo, whose spirits rose higher the nearer the ship approached the land

in which his silver lay concealed, would enter her stuffy cabin — a hole between decks hardly worthy of the name—to rally her upon her indifference to the splendors of the sea and the polychromatic beauties of the islands on their bow. Upon her father's departure, the tears, held back while he was by her side, would dim the lustre of her splendid eyes, and her white, slender hands would rise in supplication to the smiling Virgin who looked down upon her from the slanting wooden wall above her head.

Why had she, to whom the Old World offered all its sweetest gifts, become a voluntary exile, a hopeless maiden weeping in a corner of a vagrant ship? Ever with her through those weary weeks this question craved an answer. Ever from the past arose the gorgeous pictures of her former life, a life of courtly splendor where the world was gay. In the dark watches of the night, Doña Julia de Aquilar, half dozing, half awake, would tread again the stately mazes of a contre-dance or smile demurely upon a powdered and bejewelled cavalier. She would hear again the merry, mocking voices of Versailles or the stately tones of Spanish gentlemen. Suddenly the lurching of the ship would rouse her from her waking dream, and, putting up a hand, as if defying fate, she would touch the wooden walls of her voluntary cell, walls that seemed to be

bearing down upon her with the weight of worlds, crushing out the color from her cheeks, the light from her eyes, the joy of youth from her rebellious soul.

But, waking or sleeping, one face was always gazing at her from the past, a face which seemed to laugh in courteous derision at her plight. "I slew Don Josef—your betrothed," the haunting vision seemed to say, while upon the clear-cut countenance which memory photographed the girl could see the gay and mocking smile of one who knew the world too well. Her betrothed? Though dead, she hated him. Caprice and vanity had forged for her the chains that had made her, at Versailles, a captive, longing to be free. And when her freedom came, when the sword of him whose vibrant voice she could hear above the creaking and groaning of the ship had severed forever the bonds which tied her to an unloved man, her liberty was nothing worth, taking its revenge upon her for her former negligence by coming back too late. She had learned, through the gossip of a chattering court, that he who had cut down her betrothed had fled across the sea. Never again would she look upon de Sancerre's face, nor hear a voice which, while it mocked at love, had thrilled her heart of hearts. The years in passing would leave to her a memory—and nothing more.

What mattered it, then, whether she passed her weary span of life in the city of Seville or in the strange environment toward which the ship plunged on? In either case, the romance of her youth was dead. That the strange chances of existence would ever bring Louis de Sancerre again to her side, Julia de Aquilar never dreamed. Even in the prayers that she offered day and night to the Virgin Mother above her head she had never voiced a longing which, put into words, would have sounded to her ears like the incipient ravings of insanity. Her betrothed and the man whom she had begun to love had both passed from her life at the same moment, and through the gloom of night there came to Doña Julia no ray of hope save from the gentle radiance of Mother Church. The veil, and its promise of perfect peace, grew constantly more alluring to her distraught soul, as week crept into week and the very timbers of the ship cried ever louder against the cruel persistence of the lonely sea.

From a dreamless sleep—a rare blessing vouchsafed by Mother Mary—Doña Julia awoke one night with a start and sat upright in her hammock, peering into the darkness with straining eyes. What had disturbed her slumber she did not at first know. But above her head echoed the shuffling sounds of hurrying feet, and the flapping of canvas as the ship came about in a

stiff breeze. Leaping down from her hammock and throwing a long, black cape over her shoulders, she groped her way to the entrance to her cabin and threw open the clumsy door. A swinging lantern lighted the hatchway, and, almost before her eyes had grown accustomed to the sudden glare, above her head sounded the grewsome cry of "Man overboard!"

At that instant down the ladder in front of the trembling girl crept the slinking figure of Juan Rodriquez. For a fleeting moment Doña Julia caught a glimpse of the youth's pallid face, upon which there rested an evil smile made up of fear, cruelty, and triumph. Believing himself unobserved, Juan stood for a moment at the foot of the ladder looking upward toward the deck and listening intently to the uproar above his head. Then, with a subdued chuckle, which sent a chill through the heart of the motionless girl, he stole into the shadows toward his berth amidships.

The harsh cries of the panic-stricken sailors filled the night with a horrid din. The Spanish maiden, undecided whether to climb to the deck or to return to her hammock, crossed herself devoutly and murmured a prayer to St. Christopher, who watches over seamen and protects the faithful from night alarms. The mischievous lantern, vibrating wildly as the ship took the seas broadside on, threw lights and shadows across the dis-

turbed face of the girl, and seemed to rejoice at its chance to add to the uncanny features of her surroundings.

The turmoil on the deck decreased as the moments passed, but Doña Julia still stood waiting, listening, praying; chafing at inaction, but distrustful of the night beyond the hatchway. To her, thus agitated, came her father down the ladder, his worn figure bent as if it carried a great burden. He turned and faced her, and as the playful lantern swung toward them she saw that his face was ghastly pale, and that his thin hand trembled as he wiped the sea-spray from his furrowed brow.

"What is it, father?" asked the girl, springing toward Don Rodrigo and placing both hands upon his shoulders as she peered into his white face.

"Captain Hernandez," muttered the old man, in a voice that told the story of his despair—"he fell into the sea. None saw him in the blackness of the night, but far astern the helmsman heard a cry—and that was all! God rest his soul!" he groaned, crossing himself. "It will go hard with us, I fear."

"But, father—Mother Mary, pray for him!—the voyage nears its end. Captain Hernandez—the saints receive him!—had with him men who know these seas?"

"I trust them not," murmured the old man, wearily. Then, as if he regretted the admission he had made, he bent and kissed the anxious face of his daughter and said, with an effort at cheerfulness, "But fear not, Julia. All will yet be well. I've vowed an altar to St. James of Compostella, whose blessing rests on pilgrims of the faith. But how to calm the crew I hardly know. The sailors seem nigh mad with fear. They say that Satan is aboard the ship."

"Alas, I think he is," murmured Julia to herself, as she returned to her cabin and threw herself despondently upon her swinging bed. That she had solved by chance the awful secret of the captain's death, she could not for a moment doubt.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH SATAN HAS HIS WAY WITH THE *CONCEPCION*

Dawn crept sullenly across the heaving bosom of the gulf, as if disaffected by the night's dark deed. The sun gazed for a moment upon a ship accursed, then hid its light behind black, evil-looking clouds. From the east and south came winds that smote the sea and dug deep valleys in the briny waste. Then, where the valleys gaped, great hills of water rose and wet the air, and chased each other toward the wind-made chasms just beyond. Losing their temper in their wild career, the boisterous blasts let forth an angry roar and lashed the waters viciously. Before the dawn could take the name of day, a mighty battle raged between the gale and gulf.

The command of the *Concepcion* had fallen to Miquel Sanchez, a veteran seaman, but unskilled in the nicer points of navigation. Knowing the treacherous nature of the waters through which his ship was reeling, uncertain of his course, and depending for aid upon a sullen, superstitious

crew, already persuaded that the vessel had been doomed to destruction, the outlook seemed menacing, wellnigh hopeless, to the new master of the *Concepcion*, as he paced his narrow deck at dawn, and hoarsely shouted orders for the taking in of sail. The ship, showing her keel to the yawning chasms in the sea, rushed affrighted under bare poles through the welter toward the west. As the storm increased in fury, the panic of the crew grew less controllable. Even the helmsman strove to tell his beads when the eyes of Sanchez turned to scan the sky; and, broken by the howling blasts, the noise of prayers and curses echoed from the decks. The desperate sailors knew the sea too well to hug the hope that such a ship as theirs could foil the fury of the storm. Had not a priest deserted them? Had not their captain perished in the waves? Who doubted Satan's presence on the ship would be too dull to die!

Don Rodrigo de Aquilar had made his way with much effort to Doña Julia's cabin, and had found her on her knees before the painting of the Virgin, praying for a miracle that should snatch the vessel from its certain doom. The girl's face, above which raven-black locks were coiled in picturesque disorder, was white from the imminence of their peril, while her soft, dark eyes gleamed with the fervor of her supplication. As she arose to greet her father, the hand which

she slipped into his was cold, but trembled not. If the fear of death lurked in her heart, it was only by the pallor of her cheek its presence could be known. Her eyes were steady and her lips were firm as she stood there reading her father's haggard face to find, if so the saints decreed, a gleam of hope to cheer her soul.

"God's mercy on us all!" muttered the old Spaniard, pressing his daughter's hand to his breast. "This Sanchez is as stubborn as a Moor! He will not change his helm! I am no seaman, but I've sat with poor Hernandez many an hour and conned the chart of this same sea we sail. But yesternoon he made a reckoning. If the sun spake sooth, upon the course we hold we'll dash to pieces 'gainst a curving coast. I told this sullen Sanchez what I knew, but, 'though he crossed himself, he gave no heed to me."

Doña Julia's arm, showing white as marble against the black cloak hanging from his shoulders, was thrown around her father's neck. Kissing his pallid cheek, she said:

"I have no love of life; no fear of death! To die with you, my father—will it be so hard?"

"To die without confession—that is hard!" exclaimed Don Rodrigo, despondently. "I begged the Carmelite to stay with us; but, still, he gave me absolution ere he left. And if I perish, 'tis for Mother Church! But listen, Julia! I am

old and worn. A few years more or less are little worth. But you are young. You must not die, my child! If I had lured you to an ocean grave, I'm sure my soul would find no peace in Paradise."

Doña Julia had seated herself upon the edge of her uneasy hammock, and was looking down at her father, who had attempted to maintain an upright posture upon the treacherous surface of a sea-chest fastened by clamps to the cabin floor. Suddenly the old Spaniard arose and stumbled to the hatchway.

"Juan!" he cried, striving to cast his voice amidships in spite of the howling of the gale, the ominous thumping of the loosened ballast, the cries of frantic sailors, and the thunder of the seas as they pounded vengefully against the frail timbers of the ship. "Juan Rodriquez, come aft at once! Juan! Juan!"

A hand, cold as ice, was clapped upon the old man's white and trembling lips.

"Father, I implore you, do not summon him," prayed Julia, striving to drag the aged Spaniard back into her cabin. "He cannot serve you now. For Mother Mary's sake, I beg of you to leave him to his prayers. He has sore need of them."

Her protest came too late. In the dim, gray light of the hatchway the girl caught sight of a

face which even in that awful hour wore an inscrutable, evil smile, as if the diabolical spirit of the storm had rejoiced the soul of Juan Rodriquez.

"We're driving fast, Juan, upon an unknown coast," said Don Rodrigo, coolly, a detaining arm thrown around his daughter's waist. "You're lithe and muscular, and come of fearless stock. I've seen you in the water at Seville." At this moment the increasing uproar aboardship compelled the old man to raise his thin voice to a shout. Drawing from his breast a package wrapped in oil-skin, he thrust it toward the outstretched hand of his secretary. "Here is my patent from the King of Spain. 'Twill serve as Julia's title to the mines—to the greater glory of our Mother Church! And, for the sake of heathen souls beyond, your arm, my Juan, must save my daughter from these hungry seas. I say to you—"

"Father, as you love me, as you hope for Paradise, put no trust in this man's loyalty! If you must die, I do not care to live. A thousand deaths were better than a life saved by a—"

At that instant a crash, as if the storm had served as usher to the crack of doom, drove the word she would have uttered back upon her tongue. Don Rodrigo's white head was turned

to crimson by its impact with an iron-jointed beam, and, plunging forward, he lay dead beside his daughter's feet. Doña Julia tottered forward a step or two, and then fell swooning into Juan's arms.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH TWO CHILDREN OF THE SUN ASTONISH A SCOUNDREL

Before the day was ended the winds and waves had signed a truce, but on the beach, far to the westward of the Mississippi's mouth, lay ghastly trophies of their recent war. In a vain effort to propitiate the demon of the storm—according to the Portuguese sailors: to lighten the vessel, the captain would have said—cables, spars, water-casks, kits and chests of varying size, puncheons of wine, bags of sea-buscuit, cannon, powder, and stone ballast had been thrown overboard in a futile effort to float the shattered ship from a sunken reef. A portion of this impotent sacrifice the sullen surf had uplifted upon its crest, and, rushing shoreward, had tossed it spitefully upon the sands.

As the hours dragged on, while the storm, in full retreat, hurried its black battalions toward the west, the moaning beach became a resting-place for grimmer flotsam than sailor's kit or broken spar. Trusting to the stanchness of

their ships and the favor of their saints, the Spanish seamen in those adventurous days but seldom learned to swim. In constant peril from the hungry waves, forever searching unknown seas, where shipwreck menaced him at every hour, the Spaniard or the Portuguese would drown, amazed to find no saving potency in strings of beads, no buoyancy in dangling crucifix.

When the ship *Concepcion*, abandoned by the saints, struck on a rock, concealed beneath the waves by Satan's crafty hand, there was only one man aboard the vessel who had learned to breast the surf with strength and skill sufficient for a crisis such as this—and he was a white-faced landsman, who had spent his life with pen and books, learning nothing of the sea save what had come to him when bathing in the sunny waters of Seville.

For the first time in all the countless centuries since the floods had tossed it there, the curving beach now watched the grewsome pastime which a shipwreck grants the surf. A shadow on a billow rushing landward, a black spot on a white-plumed, tossing wave, a splash and hissing on the trembling sands, and there on the shore, as the storm-wind rushes by, lies a thing which was once a man, a black-and-white blotch in the dim light vouchsafed by the scudding clouds. With uncanny satisfaction at its task, the undercur-

rent, slinking back again beneath the sea, returns to lay upon the sands another horrid plaything of the surf. 'Tis novel sport for this deserted coast, but how the waves enjoy it! They roar and thunder, sob and laugh and hiss; they toss their new-found toys upon the sands, then snatch them back again and turn them 'round and 'round as if in envy of the grasping beach. But as the hours pass by, the shore keeps gaining what the billows lose. When the sun has pierced the western clouds, to cast a passing gleam across the panting sea, the glistening sands are dotted far and wide with worthless relics of the surf's grim sport.

The arms of Juan Rodriquez had been moved by mighty passions to a most stupendous feat. Strong swimmer though he was, the burden of a senseless girl, and the striving of the deep to make no blunder in the game it played, had turned his heart to ice, while the minutes seemed like hours and each stroke that he made was feebler than the last. But the struggling wretch was urged to mad endeavor by a combination of the most potent motives which can inspire the efforts of a man. Fear of death and love of a woman united in that awful hour to give to Juan's slender but well-knit body a stubborn endurance that foiled the undertow and checked, for the nonce, the surf's ghastly pastime. Slowly but persist-

ently, with gasping breath and straining eyes, now smothered in the brine, now lifted like a cork upon a wave, a man who was not fit to die fought wildly with the sea for life and love. To leave the girl to drown and struggle on alone, with certain victory within his grasp, his dread of death had tempted him to do. But at that instant a kindlier current than he had hoped to find eased for a moment the pressure upon his chest, and bore him slantingly athwart the beach far westward of the wrecked *Concepcion*.

To the fainting youth and his senseless burden the damp strand offered no easy couch, but it was better to lie there on the shore, while the enemy, checkmated, scolded and threatened and boasted in complaining impotence just outside the danger-line, than to choke and die, and go to judgment unshrived and with black crimes upon one's soul. What mattered it to Juan Rodriquez that for a time, as he lay struggling for breath upon the beach, the ripples, malicious offspring of the giant breakers, washed moist sand into his hair and ears, and licked his corpselike face as if they kissed him for his prowess while they whispered vengeful threats?

Presently the victorious swimmer regained his senses, and, tottering to his feet, dragged the shrunken figure of Doña Julia further up the beach. Her black gown clung close around her

as she lay, as if asleep, upon the sands, the only thing of beauty that the sea had brought to land. Juan bent down and placed his hand upon her bosom. The gleam of despair in his sunken eyes died out as he felt the feeble beating of her heart and upon his cheek the faint impact of her returning breath. Then he drew himself up to his full height, cast a glance of triumph at the treacherous sea, and, assured of Doña Julia's safety, hurried eastward across the shingle, glistening at that moment from the rays of the setting sun.

It was a dismal task that the dripping, trembling youth had essayed. From one staring, motionless victim of the storm to another went Juan, placing his shaking hand above hearts which would never beat again, and starting back in horror from faces which served as mirrors to the pain of sudden death. And ever as he crept on from one purple corpse to another the conviction became more fixed in his mind that he alone, of all the sturdy men upon that fated ship, had kept the spark of life within his breast. Suddenly the sightless eyes of Miquel Sanchez stared up at him in the sunlight.

"Curse you! Curse you!" cried Juan, kicking the unprotesting corpse in senseless rage. "Had I known you were a lubber, Hernandez had not died! 'Tis well for you the sea took all your

life, or I'd choke the dying breath from out your throat! Curse you!"

Bending down, the youth, a madman for the instant, seized a handful of moist sand and hurled it spitefully into the upturned face of the man whose stubborn ignorance had placed in jeopardy his schemes for self-aggrandizement. But at that horrid moment Juan Rodriquez knew, for self-confession forced itself upon him, that it was his own weak yielding to the thirst for vengeance which had wrecked the vessel. Coward that he was, the fury of his self-reproach found vicious vent upon a lifeless trunk that had no power of protest against so grave a wrong.

The fervor of his unjust anger spent, Juan turned, like a snarling cur, from the outraged corpse, and, hungry for human intercourse, resolved to return at once to Doña Julia's side, restore her to her senses, and fortify his faltering heart by the sound of a living voice. He had gazed into dead men's faces until his soul was sick with the horror of the day. He glanced at the sinking sun petulantly, as if he awaited with impatience the black shroud that oncoming night would throw over the motionless bodies scattered along the beach.

Suddenly the youth, an expression of mingled astonishment, horror, and fear upon his changing face, fell upon his knees and crossed himself with

a fervor begotten of the miracle upon which his straining eyes now gazed.

Beside the out-stretched figure of Doña Julia stood two angelic beings, taller than the run of men, who faced the sun and raised their arms straight upward toward the evening sky. They wore white robes, and from the distant dune to which the startled Juan crawled it seemed as if golden halos glorified the heads of these marvellous messengers from Paradise. They stood for a time with arms upraised, while to the straining ears of a youth whose heart felt like a lump of ice came the subdued notes of a chant which, he knew full well, was music not of earthly origin. Presently the angels bent their heads together, as if in heavenly converse, while Juan cast a stealthy glance across the sun-red sands to see if Miquel Sanchez had roused himself from death to totter toward God's envoys with an awful accusation upon his lips. When his eyes turned toward the west again, relieved to find the sailor still lying stark and still, Juan saw that the angels had gently uplifted the body of Julia de Aquilar, and, with stately grace, were bearing it away toward the twilight of the foothills. With his wet garments chilling the very marrow in his bones, the thief and murderer watched these celestial beings bearing his love away to Paradise. The grim mockery of the

chattering prayer that he breathed he could not comprehend. He paid the homage of furtive worship to angels whose searching glance, he feared, might seek him out behind his sandy lurking-place.

The red-fringed twilight had lost its glow, and the zenith had pinned a star upon its breast before Juan Rodriquez, still trembling at the miracle that he had seen, found courage to slink westward along the shore. Behind him dead men seemed to stalk, following his footsteps with grim persistence, while somewhere from the hills upon his right the eyes of angels searched his very soul. On across the beach he hurried, while the waters of the gulf turned black, and the dread silence of the night was broken only by the gossip of the waves, telling the sands a horrid secret that they had learned.

Alone with his thoughts, with the memory of dark crimes upon his soul, Juan strove through the long night to cast far behind him the haunted shore upon which angels came and went. The interplay of life and death had left him only this —the hope of wealth. Had he known that between him and the silver-mines that he sought lay more than a thousand weary miles, he would have made a pillow of the sand in his despair.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH THE CROSS IS CARRIED TO A CITY OF IDOLATERS

"I HAVE learned something of these proud pagans, Chatémuc. They are worshippers of fire; fruit ripe to pluck, to the greater glory of Mother Church."

The Mohican grunted in acquiescence as he strode forward, a copper-colored giant by the side of the gray-garbed, undersized Franciscan.

Beneath budding trees and along a flower-haunted trail went de la Salle's envoys to the children of the sun. It was high noon, and the god of the idolaters shone down upon those who would dethrone him as a deity with a kindly radiance behind which no malice lurked. Mayhap the warm-hearted luminary had grown weary of the human sacrifices offered up by his deluded worshippers, and was pleased to see the gentle Membré carrying a cross, symbol of a faith which demands for its altars no gifts but contrite hearts, toward a blood-stained city in which a savage cult still lay as a curse upon

a race endowed by nature with many kindly traits.

Between Membré, the friar, and Chatémuc, the Mohican, had long existed a cordial friendship, based, in part, upon hardships and dangers shared together, but more especially upon the relationship existing between them of a missionary to a convert. Of the many native Americans who had become good children of Mother Church under the inspiring influence of the magnetic Franciscan none had been more faithful to his adopted religion than the stately Mohican, whose proud, reserved, but inherently enthusiastic temperament derived warmth and inspiration from the friar's exalted soul. Of late years much of Zenobe Membré's success as a proselyter had been due to long and earnest consultations held in the wilderness with Chatémuc, an Indian understanding Indians, and a Roman Catholic who spoke French.

Just in front of the Mohican and the Franciscan walked Katonah by the side of de Sancerre; a forest belle attended by a courtly swain. Used as he was to the startling contrasts which the exodus of Europeans to the New World had begotten in such abundance, the friar had been struck by the incongruity of this pair, who laughed and chatted just beyond him with a gayety born of the sunshine and the spring.

At the head of the little procession strode the soldierly Henri de Tonti, attended on either hand by a long-limbed child of the sun. The Italian veteran looked like a pygmy beside his tall, white-garbed, black-haired guides, who stalked along on his flanks with a stately grace which had aroused the enthusiastic admiration of de Sancerre, a cosmopolite who had in his time looked upon many well-formed warriors both in the Old World and the New.

"They worship fire, Chatémuc," repeated the Franciscan, earnestly, after a moment's silence. "Their god is the sun, and they have a priesthood whose duty it is to keep alive in their temple a blaze of logs, first lighted, generations back, by the sun itself."

The Mohican turned and looked down at the friar with a gleam of mingled astonishment and inquiry in his melancholy eyes. The grunt to which he gave vent the Franciscan well understood.

"You are amazed at my knowledge of their customs, my Chatémuc," remarked the Franciscan, smilingly. "But have I not heard many wild and horrid tales in the years through which I've borne the cross to outlands such as this? 'Tis strange, indeed, how rumor flies through forests, over lakes, and makes the mountains rear their tops in vain. 'Tis thus

the saints work miracles for us, that we may bear the Word to savage lands. As feeble men, we could do naught, my son; but with the pioneers of Mother Church march all the hosts of heaven, and when the day is darkest and the heathen shout for joy, there comes a wonder, some marvel on the earth, some sudden splendor of the midnight sky, and the cross, triumphant, gains another tribe! Oh, Chatémuc, the glory of it all!"

The gray eyes of the Franciscan gazed upward at the set face of the seemingly stoical Indian, whose religious enthusiasm was rapidly rising to fever-heat under the intoxicating influence of the fanatical friar's carefully-chosen words—words whose effect upon the devout Mohican Zenobe Membré was not now testing for the first time.

"But their fire, father? It always burns?" asked Chatémuc, presently, in a low voice.

"Day and night, year after year, from generation to generation, they keep alive this idolatrous blaze, a flame lighted in hell and carried to these pagans by Satan's self. And while it burns, my Chatémuc, 'twill be impossible to lure their souls to Christ."

The searching gaze of the friar scanned closely the phlegmatic face of the Mohican. Not a muscle in Chatémuc's copper-colored countenance moved, but a dangerous gleam had begun to flash

in his eyes as they rested now and again upon the white-robed sun-worshippers striding on ahead of him.

"They guard the fire by day and night?"

"'Tis never left alone, my son," answered the Franciscan, fully satisfied with the effect that his words had had upon Chatémuc.

The native American is not a rash and impulsive being. Courageous Chatémuc was, beyond many of his race; but he was, nevertheless, an Indian, and inclined to attain his ends by craft and subtlety rather than by reckless daring. It was not until the French had introduced the native American to the civilizing influence of brandy that the latter abandoned, at times, in his warfare the methods of a snake, and fought, now and then, like a lion.

"How large a guard, my father, do they keep around their fire?" asked the Mohican, presently.

"That I do not know, my son. But bear this in mind, good Chatémuc: against a soldier fighting for the cross the powers of hell cannot prevail. Remember, Chatémuc, that unless that blaze is turned to ashes in their sight, my prayers and exhortations will be of no avail. We'll leave them pagans as we found them, unless their sacred fire no longer burns."

The vibrant notes in the friar's rich voice rekindled the light in the Indian's gloomy eyes.

"Either the fire or a Mohican shall die, my father!" exclaimed the warrior, in low, earnest tones. "Chatémuc, your son in Christ, has sworn an oath."

Meanwhile the high spirits of Louis de Sancerre had cast their spell upon Katonah, a maiden whose ready smile seldom changed to laughter. But on this bright spring day, treading a flower-bedecked path by the side of a man whose delicately chiselled face was to her eyes a symbol of all the joy of life, it was not hard for the Mohican maiden to affect a gayety uncharacteristic of a race lacking in vivacity.

"They are splendid fellows," remarked de Sancerre, gazing at the stalwart messengers from the Brother of the Sun. "With ten thousand men like these, Turenne could have marched around the world. But our mission to them is one of peace. I must teach them the steps of the *menuet*."

"And what is that?" asked Katonah, glancing over her shoulder to see whether Chatémuc's rebuking eye was fixed upon her. To her great satisfaction she discovered that her brother seemed to be absorbed in the words of the gray friar.

"The *menuet, ma petite?* 'Twas made for you. 'Tis a *coupée*, a high step and a balance. Your untrammelled grace, Katonah, would hurt the eyes of *mesdames* at Versailles."

Little of this the Indian maiden understood, but she realized intuitively that her cavalier had been paying her an honest compliment. Her quick ear, more sensitive to the changes in his voice than to all other sounds, had learned to detect and dread a sarcastic note in his tones that often cut her to the heart. But on this gay noontide of a day at the close of what the sun-worshippers called the Moon of Strawberries, Louis de Sancerre was a joyous, frank, vivacious man who paid the beautiful savage at his side acceptable homage with his eyes and in whose words she could find nothing to wound her pride.

"When we reach this sun-baked centre of idolatry, *ma petite*," remarked De Sancerre, presently, "we must make an effort to remain side by side. Though I should pass a thousand years in harems of the Turks, I could not forget the face of that old hag who came to haunt me by my lonely couch. 'Tis her you are to find—for the greater glory of our Mother Church. But bear this in mind, *petite*, that I must have some speech with her before the friar seizes on her tongue and makes her Spanish eloquent for Christ. I'd ask her of a miracle, before good Membré goes to work with his."

For Katonah the glory of the day had passed. The gleam of happiness died slowly in her eyes,

and the smile which lingered still upon her lips had lost its joyousness. Not only had the mocking echo returned to de Sancerre's voice, but he had recalled to the girl's mind the story that he had told her, earlier in the day, of a Spanish maiden whose name had come to him so strangely in the dark hours of the night. It was, then, the memory of a maiden over-sea which had led the Frenchman's footsteps toward the city of the sun! The misery in Katonah's heart crept into her voice.

"I'll serve you as I can," she said, gently, her eyes avoiding his. "But," and she lowered her tones until her words became a warning made in whispers—"but I say to you, monsieur, beware of Chatémuc! Stay not by my side. I'll serve you as I can, but leave me when we reach the town. Believe me when I say 'tis safer so."

"*Ma foi, ma petite,*" exclaimed de Sancerre, petulantly, turning his head to cast a glance behind him at Chatémuc, "your warning, though well meant, was hardly fair to him! Your brother is too good a friend of Mother Church to harbor hatred of a Catholic like me, who only yesternight vowed three long candles to the Virgin-mother—after that ugly crone had left my side at last."

"You smile, and speak light words," murmured Katonah, deprecatingly. "But I say to you,

beware of Chatémuc. He loves the faith, but hateth you, monsieur. I know not why. 'Tis strange!"

She gazed at the Frenchman's face with a frank admiration which brought a self-conscious smile to the courtier's lips. Flicking a multicolored insect from the tattered velvet of his sleeve, de Sancerre exclaimed:

"Ah, my Katonah! 'Tis those who know me best who love me best. Your brother is a stranger, who cannot read my heart. But, hark! what have we here?"

The noise of kettle-drums and the howling of a great throng arose in front of them. Their stately guides withdrew from de Tonti's side and stalked sedately to the rear of the little group of strangers, leaving the Italian captain to lead his followers to the imminent outskirts of the town.

"Listen to the drums, *petite!*" exclaimed de Sancerre, gayly. "We'll dance a *menuet* in yonder city, or I am not a moonbeam's favorite son!"

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE BROTHER OF THE SUN WELCOMES THE CHILDREN OF THE MOON

The Brother of the Sun, overjoyed at the opportunity now before him to offer hospitality to guests upon whose white faces he gazed with mingled admiration and astonishment, had come in state to the confines of the forest to testify to the cordiality of a greeting that illuminated his well-cut, strong, and mobile countenance. The Great Sun, as he was called—his exact relationship to the orb of day being, to a large extent, a matter of conjecture—was an elderly man, fully six feet six inches in height, with a light-mahogany complexion, hair still jet-black, and brilliant, dark eyes gazing proudly forth upon a world which, from the hour of his birth, had paid abject homage to his exalted rank.

He was enthroned in a litter resembling a huge sedan-chair, which was carried upon the shoulders of eight stalwart men in white attire but barefooted. The four long arms of the litter were painted red, and its body was decorated with

embroidered deer-skins, leaves of the magnolia-tree, and garlands of red and white flowers. His head was ornamented by a diadem of white feathers. Inserted in the lobes of his shapely ears were rings of decorated bone. He wore a necklace made of the teeth of alligators, and against the background of his raven-black hair gayly colored beads shone in the sunlight.

Behind his litter marched a mighty army of three thousand stalwart men, bare-armed, bare-legged, in a uniform of flowing, white, plaited mulberry-bark, relieved by dyed skins, striped with yellow, black, and red, thrown across their broad shoulders. They carried bows made of the acacia-wood, and arrows of reed tipped with bird-feathers. Gigantic, muscular, stern-faced warriors, the army of the sun-worshippers broke upon the gaze of the astonished Europeans with startling effect.

It has been asserted that the immediate ancestors of these children of the sun, angered at Montezuma, had joined Cortez in his victorious campaign against that unfortunate monarch. Later on, crushed and rebellious under Spanish tyranny, they had migrated toward the north and had found peaceful lands to their liking near the banks of the lower Mississippi. Whatever may be the truth of this, the fact remains that upon the afternoon which found Sieur de la Salle's envoys

the honored guests of the Brother of the Sun, the latter's army defiled to the eastward of the city with ranks which begot in the eyes of the Count de Sancerre and the veteran de Tonti a gleam of mingled amazement and admiration. Not only were the warriors of the sun, individually, men suggesting prowess and endurance, but they, as a body, gave evidence of having learned, from sources beyond the reach of native Americans further to the northward, tactics indicating a European origin. If the sun-worshippers had, in fact, suffered from Spanish cruelty, they had also derived from their tyrannical allies valuable hints pertaining to the art of war. As he gazed at this army of athletes, Henri de Tonti, for the first time since he had left de la Salle's camp, felt regret for the protest he had made against the expedition which his leader had decreed. Here before him stood a splendid band of soldiers who might be made, with some diplomacy, loyal friends to the on-pushing French.

To the mind of Zenobe Membré the martial array before him presented a magnificent collection of lost souls, well worthy, in outward seeming, of the saving grace of the cross. To snatch from the grasp of Satan so many glorious exponents of manly vigor would be, indeed, a triumph for Mother Church. Something of this he breathed into the ear of the motionless and silent

Chatémuc, who stood with the friar upon a low hillock, overlooking the plain, viewing with amazement this imposing regiment, each member of which seemed to be taller by several inches than the stately Mohican.

"Look, Katonah!" cried de Sancerre, seizing the Indian maiden by the arm. "See, there, at the side of his dark-brown Majesty's peripatetic flower-garden, stands my aged midnight prowler! Her old face is turned up to his. Can you see her, *ma petite?*"

Katonah stretched her shapely limbs to their utmost to look above the press in front of her, and presently her eyes lighted upon the shrivelled crone with whose discovery she had been intrusted by de la Salle.

"Go to your brother and keep the friar by his side until I return, Katonah," whispered the Frenchman, excitedly. "I must have speech at once with this old hag."

The sun-worshippers, pouring in throngs from their abandoned city—men, women, and children following and preceding the army in the fervor of their welcome to the white-faced children of the moon, who had come to them so mysteriously from the bosom of a wonder-working stream—impeded, by their respectful but exacting curiosity, the progress of de Sancerre toward the royal group. Women, scantily clad

but gay with flowers and feathers, would put forth their brown hands to touch the tattered velvets of the Frenchman's travel-stained but once gorgeous costume. Naked boys and girls squirmed toward him unabashed, marvelling at the pallor of his face and the splendor of the buckles upon his shoes.

"*Peste!*" muttered the annoyed courtier under his breath. "If they but knew how hard I have to strive to hold these outworn garments to my back, they'd keep their hands away. I'll reach the royal presence as naked as a baby unless they grow more gentle with my garb." And all the time he smiled and bowed, while men and women, boys and girls, cried out in wild approval of his courtly grace.

Henri de Tonti, who had lost much of his European polish through the long friction of camps and the wilderness, had reached the Great Sun's flowery throne without winning the enthusiastic good-will of these impressionable adult children, who seemed to feel instinctively that the unbending, sallow, grim-faced Italian was less worthy, somehow, of their friendship than the fascinating, smiling Frenchman who followed gayly in the footsteps of the unmagnetic captain toward their king. In the presence of royalty the advantage in address possessed by de Sancerre over de Tonti was emphasized at once.

With curt ceremony the Italian had saluted the smiling, black-eyed monarch, and had then stood silent, gazing helplessly upon the expectant throng pressing toward the litter, in the vain hope of finding some way to communicate with the royal sun-worshipper.

De Sancerre's triumphal progress toward the throne had attracted the attention of the Brother of the Sun, and the plaudits of his subjects had led the latter to believe that the leading personage among his pale-faced guests was now before him. Falling gracefully upon one knee, the Frenchman kissed the out-stretched hand of the beaming King with a flourish and a fervor which aroused the admiring multitude to a fresh outburst of delighted shouts.

"*Ma foi*, your Majesty!" exclaimed de Sancerre, in French, as he arose to his feet, "the encore warms my blood like wine! I like your people! They see at once the difference 'twixt a curmudgeon and a cavalier."

His eyes rested triumphantly upon the countenance of the disconcerted de Tonti for a moment, and then looked forth upon the sea of dusky, smiling faces upturned to his. Almost within reach of his hand stood the old woman who had borne to his bedside a welcome from the children of the sun.

"Well met, señora!" cried de Sancerre, in Span-

ish, to the grinning hag. "Come to me here! Your tongue shall bind the ties of love between your king and mine!"

With the quickness of perception which his bright eyes indicated, the Brother of the Sun seemed to grasp the significance of de Sancerre's last words, for he beckoned to the aged crone to approach the royal presence. With a rapidity of motion strangely out of keeping with her time-worn appearance, the old woman reached de Sancerre's side on the instant, and, having made her obeisance to the throne, stood looking up at the Frenchman expectantly. To the latter's astonishment he saw in her small, black, beady eyes a gleam of saturnine humor which assured him that between his soul and hers stretched at least one sympathetic bond.

"Say to his Majesty for my king, my people, and myself," went on de Sancerre, in Spanish, holding the gaze of the interpreter to his, "that our hearts beat with joy at the welcome you extend to us. Say to him that the king of kings, far beyond the great water of the sea, sends greeting to his Brother of the Sun, and craves his friendship for all time to come. This much at once; but, later on, assure his Majesty I hope to lay before him plans and projects worthy of his warlike fame, that he, your monarch, and my king of kings may know no equals 'neath

the sun and moon." De Sancerre paused to give the interpreter a chance to turn his words into her native tongue. ("In sooth," he muttered to himself, as he turned to smile again upon the now silent throng surrounding the low hillock upon which the King's litter stood, "had I but shown myself so great a diplomat in France, I might have changed the map of Europe with my tongue and pen.") "And what, señora, saith the Son of Suns?"

"He answers you with words of deepest love," answered the old woman, turning toward the Frenchman from the royal sun-worshipper, whose dark-hued face glowed with the delight de Sancerre's adroitly-framed sentences had begotten. "He offers the hand of friendship to your king, the Brother of the Moon, and will divide with him the waters and the lands in perfect amity. He bids me say to you that in this day the children of the sun find glorious fulfilment of ancient prophecies. Before the East had parted from the West, and North and South were wrapped in close embrace, 'twas told by wise, inspired tongues that some day by the waters of a boundless sea a goddess in deep sleep, sent to our people by the sun itself, would meet the eyes of roving huntsmen, wandering far afield. Our seers have told us that when she had come—Coyocop, the very spirit of the sun, our god—

our race would meet our brothers of the moon, and all the world would bow beneath our yoke."

De Sancerre, impatient by temperament, and finding difficulty in fully understanding the disjointed Spanish *patois* used by the old woman, had paid but little real attention to this long speech, in spite of the attitude of absorbed interest which he had assumed, knowing that the piercing eyes of the sun's brother were scanning his face attentively.

"Your name is, señora—is—" he asked, as the wrinkled hag paused an instant to regain her breath.

"Noco," she answered, simply.

"Doña Noco, say to his Majesty that others of our suite are approaching the throne to lay their homage at his feet, and that I, his servant, crave further speech with him anon. Then, señora, if you love me, draw aside a pace or two, that I may have a word with you alone."

Hardly had de Sancerre ceased to speak when through an opening in the throng made by the courteous sun-worshippers came toward the throne the gray-frocked friar, Zenobe Membré, followed by Katonah and Chatémuc, side by side. The Franciscan, chanting in a light but well-rounded voice a Latin hymn, bore aloft before him a rudely-carved wooden crucifix. With his large gray eyes raised to heaven, and his face

radiant with the religious ecstasy which filled his soul, he looked, at that moment, to the eyes of the overwrought sun-worshippers, like a man created of shadows and moonbeams, bearing toward their sovereign a mystic symbol potent for good or ill.

The effect of the friar's dramatic approach upon the impressionable Brother of the Sun served de Sancerre's purpose well. Unobserved by the King, whose eyes were fixed upon the chanting priest, the Frenchman seized this opportunity to draw Noco aside. Removing from his breast the piece of mulberry-bark upon which was scrawled the name of Julia de Aquilar, he asked, in a whisper which did not disguise his excitement:

"Who wrote this name? Tell me, Doña Noco, for the love of God!"

"Coyocop," muttered the hag, in a voice indicating the fear that she felt of the Frenchman's impetuosity. Her answer conveyed no meaning to the straining ear of de Sancerre.

"Tell me more, good Noco," he implored, glancing furtively at the Brother of the Sun, who had arisen to greet the oncoming Franciscan.

"I dare not — now," whispered Noco, nervously. "Anon, perhaps, if the chance should come."

With this unsatisfactory promise the inter-

preter returned to resume her duties at her sovereign's side, and de Sancerre, mystified and morose, turned to watch the efforts of Zenobe Membré to dethrone the deified sun in favor of the true God.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH CHATÉMUC FINDS THE INSPIRATION WHICH HE LACKED

"'Twas as I said it would be, my Chatémuc," exclaimed Membré, mournfully, as the friar and his convert retired from the immediate presence of royalty. "As long as yonder temple protects its hellish fire, the ears of this great monarch will be deaf to words of mine. Mother of God, 'tis sad! He has a noble face! I would that I might live to shrive him of the many sins his haughty pride begets!"

Chatémuc gave vent to what might have been a pious groan, though it sounded to a listening group of sun-worshippers like the grunt of an ill-tempered man. The half-civilized Mohican had good reasons for his discontented mood. His unexpected discovery of a race of native Americans taller, better proportioned, and seemingly more muscular than his kinsmen of the North, had touched his sullen pride. Furthermore, Chatémuc felt that he had been made a victim, at the very foot of the throne, of a

cleverly designed conspiracy. De Sancerre had spoken a few words to Noco, and the latter had addressed the King himself. In his native tongue the Great Sun had issued an order which had been translated by Noco into Spanish, and which de Sancerre had turned into French for the benefit—or, rather, for the disturbance—of Chatémuc. The royal behest had been uncompromising in its curt simplicity. The Brother of the Sun had ordered Noco to act as hostess to Katonah during the latter's sojourn within his domain. Annoyed as the Mohican had been at this command, he had reluctantly recognized the futility of an open protest against the disposition made, without his consent, of his sister. He had retired with the Franciscan from the group surrounding the King's litter, with a burning desire in his heart to make mischief. Quick to read the mind of Chatémuc, the gray friar, whose open zeal as a proselyter had been changed, by the Great Sun's stubborn indifference to the awful significance of the crucifix, into the craft of a schemer, was now pouring into the Mohican's ears words emphasizing the glories of martyrdom, and picturing the bliss which awaited those who perished for the cause of Mother Church. The Franciscan and his convert had withdrawn to a sunny slope a few yards to the eastward of the flower-strewn hillock upon which

the Brother of the Sun maintained the pomp of royalty.

Had the eyes and ears of Chatémuc and Membré been open at that moment to pleasant impressions, they would have found many sources of delight in their surroundings. They gazed upon a multicolored scene whose most striking features they had never, in their many years of forest-travel, looked upon before. Bright-hued flowers, trees gay with the blossoms of spring, birds whose brilliant plumage suggested the possibility that a rainbow, shattered into small bits, had found wings for the remnants of its glory, and, over all, a blue canopy across which floated white, fleecy playthings of the breeze, whispered in vain their story of love and peace to the zealous friar and his attentive tool.

From the westward came the inspiring shouts of the home-going multitude and the noise of kettle-drums helping the army to keep perfect time as it marched, a snow-white phalanx, toward the City of the Sun. From their coigne of vantage Membré and the Mohican could see that a monarch who had snubbed the former and enraged the latter harbored no present intention of following his subjects and his army toward his city. In fact, it soon became apparent that the Brother of the Sun was about to regale his guests with a somewhat pretentious feast. Upon

litters, undecorated and simple in construction, servants belonging to the lowest social caste—slaves in fact, if not by law—bore from the city food designed to give a substantial foundation to the Great Sun's *fête champêtre*. Bustling women brought rudely-constructed wooden benches to the grass-carpeted banquet-hall whose decorations were the flowers of spring and whose roof was the smiling sky.

It was well for the good feeling that de Sancerre had done so much to strengthen between the children of the sun and moon that the slaves made ready the feast with great despatch, for the inopportune attempt of Zenobe Membré to convert the King at one stroke from the religion of his ancestors to a faith whose mysteries a sign-language was impotent to explain had cast a damper upon the group surrounding royalty. While it was true that the Great Sun had not taken offence at the inexplicable demonstration made by the zealous friar, he had become thoughtful and silent after the retreat of Membré and the Mohican. To relieve the situation, Henri de Tonti, a soldier unfitted either by disposition or habit for delicate feats of diplomacy, made no effort. Upon his scarred and unsymmetrical countenance rested an expression of sullen discontent as he stood, with folded arms, pretending to watch the preparations for a feast for

which he had no heart. His jealousy of de Sancerre increased as he saw that, through the aid of Noco's tongue, the courtier was tempting back again the smile of friendly interest to the black-eyed monarch's face. Undecided whether to flee to the hillock where her brother stood or to place herself in Noco's charge, according to the King's command, Katonah lingered irresolutely by de Sancerre's side, while her heart beat fast with the dread of an impending peril whose source she could not divine.

Presently the activity of the slaves ceased for a moment, and the master of ceremonies—"*le maître d'hôtel*," as de Sancerre dubbed him under his breath — approached the throne with arms stretched upward above his head, and announced in one word that the preparations for the banquet had been completed.

"Cahani!" exclaimed the Great Sun, seating himself upon a bench in front of the royal litter, and motioning to de Sancerre to take the place at his right hand. "Cahani! Sit down!"

At the monarch's left stood Noco, duenna and interpreter, a useful creature at that moment, but unfitted by birth to eat meat with her sovereign. The Brother of the Sun smiled upon Katonah, and graciously offered her the second place of honor by his side. What the maiden's rank among the Mohicans might be made no differ-

ence at this juncture. She had been honored by the Great Sun's gracious recognition, and from that instant was looked up to as a princess by the ceremonious sun-worshippers, who held that their monarch's nod might serve as a patent of nobility to a stranger from an alien land. Among themselves, the road from the lowest social status to the highest was a hard one. To enter the circle of the nobility, a low-caste man and wife among the children of the sun must strangle one of their own offspring, having proved, by this heroic sacrifice, their superiority to the humble rank to which birth had consigned them.

On the royal bench beyond Katonah sat the restless and dissatisfied de Tonti, silently protesting against the turn which events had taken, but just now impotent to change their course. The Italian veteran had walked far since breaking his fast, and had undergone the exhausting conflict of many antagonistic emotions. Hunger and thirst combined for the moment to postpone the withdrawal of his followers from the too-hospitable grasp of the sun-worshippers, but the observant captain realized the immediate necessity of a consultation with de la Salle before proceeding further with negotiations which the impulsiveness of de Sancerre might twist into an awkward shape. De Tonti had started out that morning to visit, he had imagined, an insig-

nificant tribe of friendly Indians, and, behold, he had come upon a powerful nation, equipped with an army of gigantic warriors and endowed with a civilization whose outward manifestations were extremely impressive. Distrustful of de Sancerre, and knowing well the extremes to which Zenobe Membré's zeal as a proselyter might carry him, the Italian soldier scented danger in their present environment. He determined, therefore, to withdraw his followers from the feast at an early moment, to reject the Great Sun's proffer of hospitality for the night—which, he felt sure, would be extended to them—and to return to de la Salle's camp by the river as quickly as circumstances permitted.

On the small plateau below the hillock upon which the Great Sun and his guests sat in state a hundred dusky noblemen had ranged themselves along the benches, awaiting, in solemn silence, the signal from their monarch which should reawaken the activity of the serving-women and inaugurate a banquet bidding fair to last until sundown. The Great Sun had raised his sceptre of painted feathers to indicate to his master of ceremonies that the time had come for the serving of the first course, when the royal eye lighted upon Zenobe Membré and the Mohican, who still stood upon a hillock beyond the furthest line of benches, plunged in deep converse.

"Go to your friend who sings the praises of his god, the Moon," exclaimed the King, turning to Noco, who stood behind him awaiting his pleasure, and pointing his tawdry sceptre toward the Franciscan, "and say to him that the Brother of the Sun invites him to meat and drink. Have my people make a place for him, and for his captive who leans upon his voice. Go quickly, and return to me at once."

Without further delay, the monarch gave the impatiently-awaited signal for the serving of the feast, and the hunger of his guests was suddenly confronted by a throng of antagonists, any one of which was fashioned to appease, in short order, the appetite of a European. The coarser meats, the buffalo steaks and the clumsily cooked venison, were relieved by fish prepared for the table with some skill, and by old corn made palatable in a variety of ways. To Henri de Tonti's great satisfaction, he found that the *cuisine* of the sun-worshippers was the most admirable which he had encountered in his long years of pilgrimages from one native tribe to another.

It was with a great deal of reluctance that the Franciscan friar, followed by Chatémuc, had accepted the invitation extended to him from the Great Sun through Noco's overworked tongue. She had delivered her message to the friar in her mongrel Spanish, and the Franciscan's knowledge

of Latin had enabled him to grasp the general tenor of her words. He had been endeavoring to throw upon the embers of the Mohican's religious enthusiasm sufficient fuel to beget a flame that should result in immediate action of an heroic nature. But while the Franciscan dwelt upon the glories of martyrdom and the splendor of the rewards awaiting a servant of the Church who gave his life for the faith, fatigue and hunger, having possessed themselves of Chatémuc's earthly tabernacle, formed a powerful alliance against that self-abnegation which the priest labored earnestly to arouse in the Mohican's soul.

"To eat meat with these children of Satan, who worship the very fires of hell, is, I fear, to commit a grave sin," remarked the friar, gazing upward at Chatémuc dubiously, as they followed Noco toward the lower benches. Being a hungry barbarian, not a devout and learned controversialist, the Mohican could vouchsafe in answer to this nothing more satisfactory than a grunt, a guttural comment upon the delicate point raised by the agitated friar which might mean much or nothing.

Seated at the very outskirts of the picturesque throng, Zenobe Membré bent his tonsured head and told his beads for a time, watching Chatémuc furtively as the Mohican indulged freely in roast-

ed meats, half-cooked fish, and various preparations made from last year's corn.

"How proudly yonder temple rises toward the sky, my Chatémuc," muttered the friar, glancing toward the City of the Sun. "Great will be the glory of the hand chosen by the saints to pull it to the ground."

Chatémuc chewed a morsel of tough venison and said nothing, but his eyes rested with a hostile gleam upon the Great Sun a hundred yards beyond him, beside whom sat Katonah, seemingly removed from her brother by the breadth of a mighty nation. Suddenly by the Mohican's side appeared a serving-woman, who placed upon the bench at his right hand a gourd containing a fermented liquor made of the leaves of the cassia-tree. The increasing loquacity of the banqueters beyond the friar and his companion proved that the beverage, which had now reached them, possessed exhilarating properties. If the Franciscan had needed further evidence of the enlivening influence of the seductive liquor, which had come late to the feast as an ally to good-fellowship, the change in Chatémuc's face would have offered it. After emptying his gourd twice — for the Mohican liked the cinnamon flavor of the drink —Chatémuc, flashing a glance of hatred at the Great Sun, looked down at the attentive friar at his side.

"The fire of hell shall burn no more beyond," he said, jerking his hand toward the distant city, behind which the weary sun had begun to creep. "The oath I swore to you shall be no idle boast."

Having observed that the Mohican liked the wine she offered him, the woman delegated to serve the friar and his comrade refilled the latter's gourd for the third time. Chatémuc swallowed the fiery liquor eagerly, and turned to speak a final word to the priest.

At that instant Zenobe Membré's eyes were fixed upon the royal group beyond him. The Great Sun had arisen and stood waving his feathered sceptre energetically, while he gazed down at Noco, to whom he seemed to be talking with some excitement. Gazing up at the King, with a satirical smile upon his delicate face, sat de Sancerre, while de Tonti had sprung to his feet with an expression of anger upon his countenance.

When the friar turned to address Chatémuc, he discovered that the Mohican had left his side and had been lost to sight in the long shadows of the stealthy twilight.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE RUNS A STUBBORN RACE

It is but fair to the memory of a noble, if somewhat too impetuous proselyter, to say that if Zenobe Membré—whose achievements and sufferings entitle him to all praise—had realized that martyrdom, the rewards for which he had painted in such glowing colors, really menaced the aroused Mohican, he would have weighed his words with greater care. But the gray friar had long been in the habit of using heroic language to stir the soul of Chatémuc to religious enthusiasm, and he had not, as yet, found cause to regret the use which he had made for years of his pliable convert. Furthermore, the Franciscan placed absolute confidence in the Mohican's ability to take good care of his red skin. He had seen the craft of Chatémuc overcome appalling odds too many times to long indulge the fear that the Indian's sudden disappearance at this juncture presaged disaster. Nevertheless, he regretted that his convert had set out upon a mission of some peril with such unwonted precipitancy. The friar

would have felt better satisfied with himself if he had been permitted to breathe a word of caution into Chatémuc's ear before the latter had gone forth upon his lonely crusade against the fires of hell.

"At the worst," muttered the Franciscan to himself, as he made his way toward the royal litter between lines of black-eyed, smiling sun-worshippers—"at the worst, it would be one life for Paradise and a nation for the Church! May the saints be with my Chatémuc! If he won a martyr's crown, his blood would quench a fire which Satan keeps alive. But Mother Mary aid him! I love him well! I'd lose my right hand to save my Chatémuc from death! May Christ assoil me if so my words were rash!"

Thus communing with himself, the Franciscan approached the excited group surrounding royalty.

"*Ma foi*, good father, you come to us most opportunely!" cried de Sancerre, springing to his feet, a smile upon his lips but a gleam of repressed anger in his eyes. "Monsieur de Tonti is bent upon repaying his Majesty's hospitality with marked ingratitude. He orders us—courageous captain that he is—to return at once to Sieur de la Salle. As for me, I have promised the Brother of the Sun to pass the night in yon-

der city—to the greater glory of our sire, the moon!"

Henri de Tonti, a black frown upon his brow, had overheard the Frenchman's sarcastic words. Seizing the friar by the arm, he flashed a glance of rage and menace at the exasperating de Sancerre, and drew the Franciscan aside, to lay before him weighty arguments in favor of an immediate retreat to the river.

Meanwhile the younger men among the sun-worshipping nobility, moved by the same cinnamon-flavored inspiration which had driven Chatémuc toward a Satan-lighted fire, had abandoned the scene of the recent feast to indulge in athletic rivalries on the greensward which undulated gently between the outskirts of the forest and the City of the Sun.

"Will you say to his Majesty, señora," cried de Sancerre, gayly, drawing near to the Great Sun and addressing Noco, "that he has reason to be proud of the prowess of his young men? I have never watched a more exciting wrestling-bout than yonder struggle between those writhing giants. It is inspiring! It is classic! Could Girardon carve a fountain from that Grecian contest over there, 'twould add another marvel to Versailles."

The Brother of the Sun smiled down upon de Sancerre with warm cordiality as the aged inter-

preter, having caught the general drift of the Frenchman's words, turned his praise into her native tongue. The monarch's momentary annoyance at Henri de Tonti's lack of tact had passed away, and, standing erect, a right royal figure on his flower-bedecked dais, he watched, with unconcealed pride, the skilful feats with bow-and-arrow performed by the sun-worshipping aristocrats and the prodigies of strength which the wrestlers and stone-hurlers accomplished.

"Tell me, Doña Noco," exclaimed de Sancerre presently, at the conclusion of a closely-contested foot-race, which even the distraught and restless Katonah, searching vainly with her eyes for Chatémuc, had watched for a moment with bated breath—"tell me the name of yonder greyhound, carved in bronze, who smiles so disdainfully upon the victor. I have never before seen a youth whose legs and shoulders seemed to be so well fashioned by nature to outstrip the wind itself. Why does he not compete?"

The shrivelled crone grinned with delight.

"That is my grandson, Cabanacte," she answered, proudly. "He's now a nobleman, for, at the risk of life, he bore the spirit of the sun to us. The whirlwind cannot catch him. The falling-star seems slow behind his feet. He stands, in pride, alone; for none dare challenge him."

A flush crept into the pale face of the French-

man as his sparkling eyes garnered with delight all the inspiring features of the scene before him, features which formed at that moment a picture reminding him of the glory of ancient Athens, the splendors of a pagan cult which found in strength and beauty idols worthy of adoring tribute. The passing day breathed a golden blessing upon the City of the Sun, which gleamed in the distance like a dream of Greece in the old, heroic days. De Sancerre, well-read and impressionable, mused for a moment upon the strange likeness of the scene before him to a painting that he had gazed upon, in a land far over-sea, representing Attic athletes engaged in classic games beneath a stately temple behind which the sun had hid its weary face. Awakening from his day-dreams, he turned toward Noco and addressed her in a voice which made his Spanish most impressive.

"Go to Cabanacte, señora, and say to him that Count Louis de Sancerre of Languedoc—the fairest province in the silver moon—dares him to a test of speed, the course to run from here to yonder lonely tree, near to the city's gate, and back again."

A grin of mingled admiration and amazement lighted the old hag's face as she turned toward the King and repeated to him his guest's daring defiance of a runner whose superiority no sun-

worshipper had cared to test for many waning moons. A courteous smile played across the firm, well-cut mouth of the Great Sun as he listened to Noco's words, but the scornful gleam in his black eyes as they rested upon the Frenchman's slender, under-sized figure was not lost upon the observant challenger. De Sancerre realized fully that he had placed in jeopardy his influence with the Brother of the Sun by risking a trial of speed with a youth whose fleetness he had had, as yet, no means of gauging. If he should be outstripped by Cabanacte the goodwill of the Great Sun would be changed to contempt, and the relationship of host to guests, already disturbed by de Tonti's lack of tact, might be transformed into that of a victor to his captives. What, then, would become of de Sancerre's efforts to solve the mystery to which old Noco held the key?

But de Sancerre, always self-confident, placed absolute faith in the elasticity of his light, nervous frame, whose muscles had been hardened by his campaigns over-sea and by his wanderings with de la Salle. No fleeter foot than his had been found in the sport-loving army of Turenne, and he had been as much admired in camps for his agility as at courts for his grace. If, perchance, he should outrun the stalwart Cabanacte, de Sancerre felt sure that his easily-won popu-

larity with these impressionable sun-worshippers would be placed upon a much more stable foundation than its present underpinning of smiles and courtly bows.

"My grandson, Cabanacte, sends greeting to the envoy of the moon," panted Noco, returning speedily to de Sancerre's side, "and will gladly chase the wind with him in friendly rivalry. He bids me say that night falls quickly when the sun has set and that he craves your presence at this moment on the course."

Making a courteous obeisance to the Brother of the Sun, de Sancerre was about to hasten to the side of his gigantic adversary, who, stripped almost to nakedness, stood awaiting his challenger, when he felt a detaining hand upon his arm, and, turning petulantly, looked into Katonah's agitated face.

"Chatémuc! My brother! I cannot see him anywhere!"

"Fear not, *ma petite*," exclaimed de Sancerre, cheerily. "Wait here until I've made this sun-baked Mercury imagine he's a snail, and we'll find your kinsman of the joyous face. 'Twould break my heart to lose the gay and smiling Chatémuc! Adieu! I go to victory, or, perhaps, to death! Pray to Saint Maturin for me, Katonah! He watches over fools!"

A great shout arose from the sun-worshippers

as de Sancerre and Cabanacte, saluting each other with ceremonious respect, stood side by side awaiting the signal for their flight toward the distant tree which marked the turning-point in the course which they were about to run. The Frenchman, attired in tattered velvets and wearing shoes never designed for the use of an athlete, seemed to be at that moment handicapped by both nature and art for the race awaiting him. Almost a pygmy beside the bronze giant, whose limbs would have driven sleep from a sculptor's couch, de Sancerre had apparently chosen well in asking Katonah for an invocation to the saint who protects fools from the outcome of their folly. The black-eyed sun-worshippers glanced at each other in smiling derision. Surely, these children of the moon must eat at night of some plant or fruit which stirred their blood to madness when they wandered far afield! No dwarf would dare to measure strides with a colossus unless, indeed, he'd lost his wits through midnight revelry in moonlit glades! This white-faced, queerly-dressed, and most presumptuous rival of the mighty Cabanacte might smile and bow and gain the ear of kings, but look upon him now, with head bent forward, waiting for the word! Fragile, petite, thin in the shanks, and with a chest a boy might scorn, he dares to measure strides with a sturdy demigod who towers

above him, a giant shadow in the gloaming there!

A howl from the overwrought throng shook the leaves upon the trees. The runners had sprung from the line at a cry and, elbow to elbow, were speeding toward the distant tree. Falling back to Cabanacte's flank, de Sancerre, seeming to grow taller as he ran, and using his feet with a nimbleness and grace which emphasized the clumsiness of his fleet rival's tread, hung with ease upon the giant's pace, moving with a rhythmical smoothness which indicated reserved power. Through the twilight toward the city rushed the courtier and the savage, made equals at that moment by the levelling spirit of a manly sport, while the onlookers stood, eager-eyed and silent, watching with amazement the pertinacity of the lithe Frenchman who so stubbornly kept the pace behind their yet unconquered champion.

As the racers turned the tree marking the half of their swift career, the dusky patriots saw, with growing consternation, that the child of moonbeams still sped gayly along behind the stalwart, wavering figure of a son of suns. The pace set by Cabanacte had been heartrending from the start, for he had cherished the conviction that he would be able to shake off his puny rival long before the turn for home was made. But ever as he strove to increase his lead the bronze-tinted

athlete heard, just behind his shoulder, the dainty footfalls of a light-waisted, wiry, bold-hearted antagonist, who panted not in weariness behind the champion after the manner of his rivals of other days. Out of the glowing West came the racers side by side, every step a contest as they struggled toward the goal.

"Cabanacte! Cabanacte!" cried the sun-worshippers, mad with the fear that the dwarf might outrun the giant at the last. For the Frenchman had crept up from behind and was now speeding homeward on even terms with his delirious, reeling, wind-blown, but still unconquered rival. For a hundred yards the racers fought their fight by inches, each marvelling in his aching mind at the stern persistence of his antagonist. Then, when the strain grew greater than human muscles could endure, the bursting heart of de Sancerre seemed to ease its awful pressure upon his chest, his faltering steps regained their light and graceful motion, and, passing Cabanacte as the latter glanced up with eyes bloodshot with longing, the Frenchman, with a gay smile upon his pallid face, rushed past the line, a winner of the race by two full yards.

The hot, generous blood of the sun-worshippers bounded in their veins as they seized the tottering victor and, with shouts of wonder and acclaim, raised him to their shoulders and bore

"THE FRENCHMAN, WITH A GRAY SMILE UPON HIS PALLID FACE, RUSHED PAST THE LINE, A WINNER OF THE RACE BY TWO FULL YARDS."

him, a wonder-worker in their eyes, to the smiling presence of their astonished king. But before de Sancerre could receive the congratulations of the Brother of the Sun, the voice of Katonah had reached him over the heads of the excited patricians.

"Monsieur," cried the Mohican maiden, in French, her voice vibrating with excitement, "Père Membré and Monsieur de Tonti have set out for the camp, and Chatémuc has not returned!"

"*Peste, ma petite!*" exclaimed de Sancerre, blowing her a kiss over the turmoil of black heads beneath him. "Why trouble me with trifles such as these? See you not that a splinter from a moonbeam has put the sun to shame —to the greater glory of our Mother Church. *Laude, Katonah! Laude et jubilate!*"

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE RESULTS OF CHATÉMUC'S ENTHUSIASM ARE SEEN

"COURAGE, *ma petite!* We'll find your Chatémuc; then learn the mysteries of yonder sun-kissed town. That the stubborn captain has deserted us is hardly strange. Always in fear of de la Salle's displeasure, Monsieur de Tonti has grown erratic, unreliable, jealous. As for the friar, his retreat surprises me. He lacks not courage nor persistence. He would not leave our brother of the sun without, at the least, one more attempt to show him the path which leads to Mother Church."

Released from the enthusiastic arms of the noblemen who had carried him in triumph to their king, de Sancerre was now following the royal litter toward the City of the Sun, walking the well-beaten path with the mincing step of a courtier whose feet, though swifter than the winds, pay homage gayly to Grace as a worthier deity than Speed. On either side of the victorious runner, whose eyes still glowed with the

joy of triumph, walked Noco and Katonah. The latter, downcast and apprehensive, gazed gloomily toward the city, whose roofs could now be plainly seen, while she listened apathetically to the Frenchman's encouraging words. Changing the tongue he used from French to Spanish, de Sancerre, turning toward Noco, who looked, in the twilight, like a hideous heathen idol carved in mahogany, said:

"I trust, señora, that your courageous grandson, my very worthy opponent, will bear me no ill-will because my slender body was less a burden than his giant frame."

Noco, to whom de Sancerre's overthrow of the erstwhile invincible Cabanacte had appeared like a miracle wrought by some mysterious moon-magic, gazed reverentially at the Frenchman with beady, black eyes, which seemed to be fully half a century younger than the other features of her wrinkled face. Her countenance was a palimpsest, with youth staring out from beneath the writings made by time.

"My grandson, Cabanacte, O Son of the Full Moon, will ever do your bidding with a loyal heart. According to the customs of our land, your triumph in the race entitles you to service at his hands until his feet wax swift enough to fly away from yours."

"Caramba!" exclaimed de Sancerre, whose

expletives bore testimony to the cosmopolitan tendencies of his adventurous career, "your words, señora, rejoice my heart! I stand in sore need of a servitor to save me from the nakedness which one more heated foot-race would beget. If Cabanacte can repair the rents which make my costume such a marvel to the eye, I'll free him from his *villein socage* and make him proud again."

Enough of this the old hag understood—enlightened, to a great extent, by the Frenchman's eloquent gestures—to emphasize the grin upon her ugly but intelligent face.

"Cabanacte is a warrior, not a maker of flowing robes!" she exclaimed, with a raucous chuckle. "But to-night old Noco will repair the holes in the Son of the Full Moon's garb. Look at this." Fumbling at her waist, she presently held out to de Sancerre's gaze a needle made of fish-bone. Lowering her voice, she said: "Coyocop, the spirit of the sun, has not disdained to let my needle prick her sacred dress. She weeps, and cares for nothing but to lie upon her couch and whisper secrets to the mother of the sun. 'Tis sad, but so she must fulfil her mission to our race. Our nation's wise men and the priests who tend the temple-fire had told us she would come. My grandson, Cabanacte, bore her from the sea."

De Sancerre listened attentively to the old crone's words. He recalled Noco's assertion that

Coyocop had scrawled his inamorata's name upon the mulberry bark, though, at the time, he had not grasped the full significance of her mumbled, mongrel-Spanish words, rendered less clear to him by the use of the meaningless name, Coyocop. But now, as they hurried on behind the porters who carried the King's litter, followed by a hundred chattering noblemen, a veil seemed to be lifted from de Sancerre's mind. His heart beat with suffocating rapidity, and his voice trembled as he looked down at Noco, trying to catch her eyes in the darkening twilight, and exclaimed:

"'Twas Coyocop who scratched that name upon the bark? But why, good Doña Noco? Tell me why."

The old woman glanced over her shoulder, to assure herself that they could not be overheard. Then she whispered:

"I told her the white-faced children of the moon had come to us upon the bosom of the flood, according to an ancient prophecy. The temple-priests would strangle me with cords if they should learn how my old tongue has wagged. They watch me closely, for they worship her. But once she found a moment, when no priest was near, to scratch the mystic symbols on the bark. I crept away at night and, lo, your god, the moon, was guide to my old feet—and, so, I came to you from Coyocop."

That Noco had told him all she had to tell, the Frenchman did not for a moment doubt. But, even then, she had thrown little light upon the mystery which confronted him. A mondain to his finger-tips, at heart a sceptic, de Sancerre fostered no belief in miracles. Surrounded, as he had been all the days of his life, by men and women steeped in superstition, his spirit had revolted at the impostures which had served to blind mankind through centuries of human history. Had de Sancerre been wrought of the stuff of which his age was made, he would have reached the conclusion at once that here in the wilderness the avenging spirit of the Spaniard whom he had slain in France was haunting him at night to play him tricks to drive him straight to madness. 'Twould be so easy to account thus for what his reason could not now explain. But de Sancerre was a man who, intellectually, had pressed on in advance of his times. By policy a conformist to the exterior demands of his avowed religion, he had long lost his faith in the active interference in earthly affairs of saints and devils. How the name of Julia de Aquilar had found its way to a piece of vagrom bark in a wilderness, thousands of miles across the sea from the land of her nativity, he could not explain, nor could he harbor, for an instant, the wild idea that Coyocop and his inamorata would prove to be identical.

In spite of the malicious horns of his dilemma, nevertheless, he eliminated from his thoughts the possibility that he had become the plaything of supernatural agencies. But who was Coyocop? He must look upon her face without delay.

"Señora, listen!" exclaimed de Sancerre, seizing Noco by the arm. "I must see the spirit of the sun to-night! From the mountains of the moon, where reigns our god in silvery state, I bear a message to the goddess Coyocop. *Peste*, Doña Noco! Have you gone to sleep?" He shook her gently, striving hard to find her eyes.

"It cannot be," muttered the old crone, trembling under his grasp as if the night-wind chilled her time-worn frame—"it cannot be. 'Twould mean your life—and mine."

"Hold, señora! Remember Cabanacte—and pin your faith to me! No matter what the odds may be, the brother of the moonbeams always wins! Bear that in mind, good Noco, or the future may grow black for thee. Be faithful to my fortunes—and I'll make your grandson noble once again."

How deep an impression his words had made upon the beldame, de Sancerre could not tell, for at that moment there arose behind him a weird chant, sung by a hundred tuneful voices, rising

and falling upon the evening air with thrilling effect. Suddenly beyond them from the very heart of the City of the Sun arose a mightier chorus than the King's suite could beget, and the night grew vibrant with a wild, menacing song which chilled de Sancerre's heart and caused Katonah to press close to his side, in vain striving for the comfort she could not find.

Presently the litter of the King, passing between two outlying houses, turned into a broad avenue which led directly to the great square of the city, at one side of which stood the temple of the sun. The moon had not yet arisen, and what was twilight in the open had turned to night within the confines of the town. De Sancerre, who was a close observer, both by temperament and by habit, strove in vain to obtain a satisfactory view of the dwelling-houses between which the royal litter passed. But when the King and his followers had reached the outskirts of the great square, the Frenchman forgot at once his curiosity as a traveller; forgot, even for a moment, the problem to solve which he had dared to enter this pagan city, in defiance of all discipline and in direct disobedience to La Salle's lieutenant. The scene which broke upon his staring eyes stilled, for an instant, the beating of his heart, which seemed to bound into his throat to choke him.

The square between the King's litter and the entrance to the temple was thronged with men and women, in front of whom stood long lines of stalwart warriors, the flower of the army which had recently astonished the eyes of the wanderers from over-sea. Waving lights and shadows, the quarrelsome offspring of flaring torches, changed constantly the grim details of the scene, as if the night wind strove to hide the horrors of a dancing, evil dream.

Directly in front of the main entrance to the temple of the sun-worshippers stood a post to which Chatémuc had been tied by cords. On either side of him white-robed priests, wielding long wooden rods, the ends of which had been turned to red coals in the sacred fire, prodded his hissing flesh, while they sang a chant of devilish triumph, in which the populace, enraged at the sacrilege attempted by the Mohican, joined at intervals.

Facing the dying martyr, who gazed down at him with proud stoicism, knelt the gray-frocked Franciscan, Zenobe Membré, holding toward the victim of excessive zeal the crude crucifix, for love of which Chatémuc, the Mohican, was now freeing his soul from torment.

"Nom de Dieu!" cried de Sancerre, placing his hand upon his rapier, "this savage sport must end!" In another instant the reckless French-

man, carving his way to death, would have challenged an army, single-handed, had not Katonah, reeling from the horror of her brother's death, fallen senseless into his reluctant arms.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH THE GRAY FRIAR DONS THE LIVERY OF SATAN

"It was a miracle! A voice from heaven whispered in my ear, and, turning back, I left de Tonti, angry, threatening, to take his way alone. To give my Chatémuc the words of absolution at the last, the Virgin Mother led me by the hand. And now in Paradise he wears a martyr's crown. The saints be praised!"

The earnest eyes of the Franciscan were turned upward in an ecstasy of gratitude and devotion. Seated upon a wooden bench by the gray friar's side, de Sancerre listened musingly to Membré's account of the Italian captain's attempt to entice him back to de la Salle's camp before he had learned the outcome of Chatémuc's effort to extinguish a flame from hell.

Noco, well understanding the present temper of the sun-worshipping priesthood, and acting upon a command given to her by the Great Sun himself, had managed, with considerable difficulty, to persuade de Sancerre and Katonah to

secrete themselves for a time in her unpretentious but not comfortless hut. Her rescue of Zenobe Membré from his threatening environment at the martyred Mohican's side had been, she flattered herself, a triumph of adroitness, and she sat in a dark corner of the room at this moment whispering to her gigantic grandson, Cabanacte, warm praise of her own cleverness. She had saved the Franciscan from the immediate vengeance of the sun-worshipping priests by suggesting to the latter that the summary execution of the gray-frocked singer of unorthodox chants might arouse the anger of Coyocop, whose coming, prophecy had told them, was connected, in some occult way, with the predicted advent of the white-faced envoys from the moon. Sated with the cruel entertainment vouchsafed to them by the death-twitchings of the stoical Chatémuc, the white-robed guardians of the sun-temple had permitted the Franciscan to depart with Noco, although the latter well knew that thenceforth every movement which she and her gray-garbed companion made would be noted by the dark eyes of fanatical spies.

The room in which the refugees—for such the antagonism of the dominant sun-priests had made them—had found shelter for the night was a picturesque apartment, fifteen feet in length and breadth, and lighted by flickering gleams from

the embers of a fire of walnut-wood. Upon a bed of plaited reeds, resting upon a wooden frame two feet high, lay Katonah, grief-stricken, motionless, making no sound. Heart-broken at her brother's awful fate, the Indian maiden nursed her sorrow in loneliness and silence. In vain had the good friar attempted to console her for her irreparable loss by painting, in eloquent words, the rewards awaiting a martyr who died for love of Mother Church. Katonah was too recent a convert to the Franciscan's faith to realize and rejoice in the unseen glories of her brother's heroic self-sacrifice. She had listened to Membré's soothing words with a grateful smile upon her strong, symmetrical face, but evident relief had come to her when the gray-frocked enthusiast had retired from her bedside to seat himself beside de Sancerre in the centre of the room.

"Pardieu!" muttered the Frenchman, casting a searching glance at the corner in which Noco and Cabanacte were engaged in earnest, low-voiced converse, "these people show outward signs of enlightenment, but they have a most brutal way of putting a man to death. The savage delight which those white-robed devils seemed to take in basting poor Chatémuc made my sword-point itch. 'Twas well for me Saint Maturin was kind. He checked my folly just in time! But listen, father! The martyrdom of

Chatémuc must now suffice. Those imps of hell will have your life, anon, unless you foil their craft by craft. I think I hear their stealthy footsteps menacing these sun-cooked walls and making challenge of our god, the moon."

The Franciscan put up his hand to enforce silence that he might listen to the furtive footfalls outside the hut. At that moment Noco and her grandson stole toward the centre of the room. The stalwart sun-worshipper, who now looked upon de Sancerre as a supernatural being worthy of the most reverential treatment, towered aloft in the narrow chamber like a keen-eyed, sun-burnt ogre who had lured a number of unlucky dwarfs to his den to have his grim way with them. Stretching his long body at full length before the sputtering fire, Cabanacte turned his admiring gaze toward the troubled face of his fleet-footed conqueror and waited for Noco to put into words the thoughts which fretted him.

"You—all of you—must leave here to-night, señor," said the old woman in a guttural whisper. "The Brother of the Sun is your friend, but the priests of the temple look with suspicion upon you and the gray chanter. They would not dare to defy openly the King, but they have tracked you to this hiding-place and will work you mischief if they may."

"But, señora, I fear them not!" exclaimed de

Sancerre, drawing his rapier and allowing the fire-flashes to gleam along the steel. "Saving the father's presence here, one sword against a priesthood is enough. My tongue's as boastful as a Gascon's, is it not? But list to this, señora! I leave here only when I've had some speech with Coyocop, the spirit of the sun. When that may be I do not know, but Louis de Sancerre, a moonbeam's eldest son, has sworn an oath—and so, señora, my welcome I must stretch."

Cabanacte, who had learned a little distorted Spanish from his loquacious grandparent, had caught the drift of the Frenchman's speech. Putting forth a large, brown hand, shapely in its massiveness, he touched the buckles upon de Sancerre's shoes and exclaimed, in what sounded like a parody upon Noco's rendition of an alien tongue:

"Good! Good! The son of moonbeams has a lofty soul! And Cabanacte is his body-guard! No harm shall come to you, despite the oath our priests have sworn!"

The smile upon de Sancerre's ever-changing face was the visible sign of varied emotions. Pleased at the cordial proffer of Cabanacte's friendship, the Frenchman was astonished to discover that the giant had picked up a Spanish vocabulary which, in spite of his peculiar pronunciation, was not wholly useless. That the

survival of a Spanish *patois* among these sun-worshippers suggested a pathetic page of unwritten history de Sancerre realized, but his mind at that moment was too disturbed to linger long over an ethnological and linguistic problem. Turning to face the Franciscan friar, he said:

"Père Membré, these pagan priests seek vengeance upon you. They have no reason yet for hating me, a splinter from a moonbeam who makes no open war against their creed. But, for the cause of Mother Church, we must lure them from their grim idolatry. Let Cabanacte use his strength and wits to find a pathway leading to our camp by which you may return. Here I shall stay until our leader, coming North again, shall send me word to quit this place, leaving behind me a friendly race, soil ready for the seeds of living truth."

It was not excessive self-laudation which had led de Sancerre to believe that he possessed the qualifications essential to success in diplomacy. Whenever he had set out to effect a purpose seemingly worthy of studied effort, he had found no difficulty in checking the satirical tendencies of his flippant tongue. At this moment he was gazing at the Franciscan's disturbed countenance with eyes which seemed to gleam with the fervor of his zeal for Mother Church. Wishing to

convince Père Membré that the ultimate conversion of these pagans from their worship of hell-fire to the true faith depended upon their possession of a hostage who should study their manners and customs and learn the shortest path by which their unregenerated souls might be reached, de Sancerre explained his plan of action to the friar with an unctuous fervor which convinced the latter that he had underestimated the errant courtier's enthusiasm as a proselyter.

"But the Mohican maiden, monsieur? I owe it to Chatémuc, the martyr, now with the saints in Paradise, to place her in the care of de la Salle. His sword, my crucifix, must guard Katonah for her brother's sake."

The walnut embers in the clumsy fireplace had grown black and cold. For some time past no sound had reached the ears of the schemers from the menacing environment outside the hut. The moon had touched its midnight goal, and sought, in passing, to probe the secrets of old Noco's home.

"*Bonnement!*" exclaimed de Sancerre. "Go to her at once, good father, and tell her that 'tis best she should return with you to-night. I'll join you presently. Meanwhile, I must have further speech with Noco and her grandson."

Presently the moonbeams, which had stolen into the hut through chinks between the timbers

and the hardened mud, threw a dim light upon a most impressive tableau. The white face of the Frenchman was bent close to the dusky visage of the athletic sun-worshipper, while Noco, squatting upon the ground, bent toward them her wrinkled, grinning countenance, an effigy of "Gossip," wrought in bronze. Bending over the reed-made couch upon which Katonah, dumb with misery, lay listening, stood the gray friar, whispering to the phlegmatic and seemingly obedient maiden the Frenchman's late behest.

Before the moonbeams could take their tale abroad, the scene had changed. From a corner of the hut Noco had brought to the Franciscan and his charge flowing garments of white mulberry-bark, in which Katonah and the friar reluctantly enrobed themselves. With a harmless dye, old Noco, whose time-tested frame seemed to defy fatigue, deftly changed the protesting Membré's white complexion to light mahogany.

"Mother of Mary! I fear me this is sacrilege," muttered the friar, nervously seeking his breviary beneath the white uniform of a lost sun-worshipper. "*Satis, superque!* You'll make my face, old woman, as black as Satan's heart! The saints forgive me! Were not my life of value to the Church, I'd gladly die before I'd don this ghostly livery of sin."

Meanwhile de Sancerre had been straining his

weary eyes in the effort to scratch a message to de la Salle with his dagger's-point upon a slip of white bark.

"The Spanish have tampered with a mighty nation," he wrote. "I remain to learn the truth; to find a way to win them to our king. Camp where you are when you return. I'll learn of your approach, rejoin you then, and bring you news most worthy your concern. *Au revoir, mon capitaine!* For France, with sword and crucifix!"

As he scrawled his signature beneath these words, Katonah glided silently to his side, a maiden whose grace was not destroyed by her unwonted garb, a costume enhancing the dark beauty of her proud, melancholy face. Her light hand rested gently upon his arm for a moment.

"The good father tells me that you would have me go," she murmured in a voice of mingled resignation and regret. De Sancerre, handing her the slip of mulberry-bark upon which he had scratched a message to his leader, smiled up into the yearning face of the lonely girl.

"Give this to our captain, Sieur de la Salle," he said, sharply. "Fail not, Katonah! My life, I think, depends upon this scrawl."

A smile flashed across the maiden's mournful face as she pressed the bark to her bosom, heav-

ing with a conflict of emotions to which no words of hers could give relief.

"His hand shall hold it ere the sun is up," she said, simply. "Farewell!"

De Sancerre, looking up into the girl's eyes felt, with amazement, the tears creeping into his. He bent his head and imprinted a kiss upon her slender, trembling hand, which felt like ice beneath his lips.

"Courage, *ma petite!*" he cried, with forced gayety. "You will return anon! And then, the river once again, and home—and friends—and—"

His voice broke, and when he had regained his self-control he saw that Katonah had joined Cabanacte and the friar at the entrance to the hut.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH A SPIRIT SAVES DE SANCERRE FROM DEATH

THERE reigned in Noco's hut intense silence. Stretched upon a bench in the centre of the room lay de Sancerre, his head bent forward and his eyes agleam, while he listened apprehensively to the murmurs of the night outside. On the ground at his feet squatted his aged hostess, quick to interpret every sound which echoed from the sleeping town. Her eyes still burned with the light of her marvellous vitality, but her present posture indicated that her old bones had grown weary of the friction begotten by a long and exacting day.

"All is well, señora? You hear no threatening sound?" De Sancerre's voice bore witness to the excitement under which he labored at that crucial moment.

"A dog barks, near at hand; an owl hoots, far away. Our friends are safe beyond the town—and all is well!"

"*Bien!* Doña Noco, I trust the keenness of your ears. I feared the searching gaze of wake-

ful spies. 'Tis possible your priests have gone to sleep."

The old hag grinned. "Make no mistake," she exclaimed, in her broken Spanish. "Their eyes have seen your people, but, fearing Cabanacte's wrath, they dared not search beneath the white robes at his side. Within the temple chattering priests will ask each other whom my grandson guides. They'll ask in vain! But, hark! The night's as quiet as a sleeping babe."

"Then, when I'm in the mood, I'll vow a candle to St. Raphael," cried de Sancerre, lightly. "He travelled safe by wearing a disguise! But tell me, Doña Noco, is the coast now clear? I've set my heart upon a look at Coyocop's abode. I cannot sleep until I know where this fair spirit of the sun is lodged."

The beldame's black eyes flashed with excitement. Her overwrought frame seemed to renew its vigor as she arose to her feet and hurried toward the low-cut entrance to the hut. An instant later, de Sancerre found himself the solitary occupant of a dreary and disordered room. He peered through the shadows toward the exit through which Noco had passed and, for a moment, doubt of her good faith entered his mind. He fully comprehended the perils of his environment, and realized that upon the loyalty of the old hag who had just left his side depended his

escape from the dangers which beset him. While it might be that he, an envoy from the moon, helped to fulfil an ancient prophecy in which these fickle sun-worshippers put faith, the fact remained that their chief, the Great Sun, had failed to give him countenance before the temple priests. It had become painfully apparent to de Sancerre that the real centre of authority in this land of superstitions was to be looked for near the sacred fire and not at the King's throne. The fact that the Brother of the Sun had found it inexpedient to lodge the Frenchman in the royal residence bore testimony to the strong ties which bound the palace to the temple, to the close relationship of church and state. To a man who had spent years at Versailles, the influence exerted by a priesthood upon a king was not a marvel.

"*Ma foi!*" muttered de Sancerre to himself, as he rested his aching head upon his hand and watched expectantly the hole in the wall through which Noco had departed. "The old finesse which served me well at courts has worn itself to naught. In France or in this wilderness my fate's the same. I jump to favor—then the King grows cold and potent priests usurp the place I held. But, even so, the tale is not all told. I'm here to solve a puzzle, not to fawn upon a prince nor tempt the vengeance of a temple's brood.

So be that Noco's true, I yet may work my will upon a stubborn mystery."

At that moment a hideous grin, weird offspring of ivory and bronze, rewarded de Sancerre's straining gaze.

"Follow me, señor," whispered Noco through the hole which served as a door to the hut. "There's no one in the city now awake save nodding priests who feed the fire with logs. I'll show you in the moonlight where Coyocop's at rest."

In the white light of a cloudless night the City of the Sun lay disguised in a beauty which the bright glare of its own deity destroyed by day. Grouped around the temple, the houses of the sun-worshippers, rising gracefully from artificial mounds, were softened in their outlines by the moonbeams until they formed a city upon which de Sancerre, accustomed, as he was, to the architectural splendors of the old world, gazed with surprise and pleasure. Choosing the shadows cast by the sun-baked walls for her pathway, Noco led the stranger past the most pretentious building in the town, the sacred temple in which a mystic fire was ever kept alive. Like an earthen oven, one hundred feet in circumference, the stronghold of a cruel priesthood impressed the Frenchman with its grim significance. As he and his withered guide crept noiselessly past

the silent, shadow-haunted fane, de Sancerre succumbed to a shudder which he could not readily control. Upon a palisade above his head, surrounding the temple upon all sides, skulls gleamed in the moonlight, bearing sombre witness to the horrors of the cult by which a noble race was brutalized.

"*Dios!*" he muttered in the old hag's ear, as he clasped her by the arm. "The shambles of your creed offend my sight! If you love me, señora, we'll leave this place behind!"

They had not far to go. Beyond the temple and facing the east stood the spacious cabin in which the Brother of the Sun maintained his royal state. It was silent and deserted as they stole by it, to take their stand in the shadow cast by a house proud of its nearness to the home of kings. White and silent, the night recalled to de Sancerre's mind an evening in the outskirts of Versailles when, having eluded the watchful eyes of his Spanish rival, he had tempted Doña Julia de Aquilar to a stroll beneath the moon. His heart grew sick with the sweetness of his revery. He could see again the dark, liquid eyes, the raven hair, the pale, perfect face of a woman whose splendid beauty mocked him now as he stood there a waif, blown by the cruel winds of misfortune to a land where grinning skulls stared down at him at night, as if they'd heard the

story of his lost love and rejoiced at his cruel plight.

"Come! Come, señora," he murmured, fretfully, turning to retrace his steps, and seemingly forgetful of the object of his perilous pilgrimage. "Come! Let us go back!"

"Hush, señor! Listen!" whispered the old crone, hoarsely, pulling him closer toward the house in the shadow of which they lingered. "Listen! 'Tis Coyocop!"

De Sancerre leaned against the wall of the hut, made dizzy for a moment by the wild beating of his heart. In perfect harmony with the melancholy beauty of the night arose a sad, soft, sweet-toned voice, which came to him at that moment like a caress bestowed upon him in a dream and made real by a miracle. De Sancerre clutched old Noco's arm with a grasp which made her wince. Gazing at the moon-kissed scene before him with eyes which saw only a picture of the past he listened, white-lipped, breathless, trembling, to an old Spanish song, into which Juan Fernandez Heredia, more than a century before this night, had breathed the passion and the melancholy of a romantic race.

"To part, to lose thee, was so hard,
So sad that all besides is nought;
The pain of death itself, compared
To this, is hardly worth a thought."

A sob set to music, despair turned into song, a voice telling of unshed tears echoed through the night and gave way to silence for a time.

"*Nom de Dieu!* Do I dream, or am I going mad?" muttered de Sancerre to himself, peering down at his silent companion as if seeking an answer to the questions that beset him. Suddenly the voice, whose tones spoke to his heart in the only language known to all the world, again made music out of misery:

"There is a wound that never heals—
'Tis folly e'en to dream of healing;
Inquire not what a spirit feels
That aye has lost the sense of feeling.

"My heart is callous now, and bared
To every pang with sorrow fraught;
The pain of death itself, compared
To this, is hardly worth a thought."

The song gave way to silence, and, drawing himself erect, like a man who awakens from a trance, de Sancerre turned to Noco:

"'Tis the spirit of the sun," whispered the old crone. "'Tis Coyocop. She sings at night the songs we cannot understand."

"Listen, señora," muttered the Frenchman, striving to check the impetuosity which tempted him to defy the perils surrounding him and to enter the hut without more ado. "'Tis the spirit

of the sun—of life and hope and love! I worship her, señora. By what astounding chance—But let that pass! Doña Noco, you must speak to Coyocop at once. Tell her—"

De Sancerre's words died upon his lips, for the wiry old hag had dragged him by the arm around a corner of the cabin before he could end his sentence.

"Silence," she murmured. "A priest of the temple has come this way to listen to the spirit's voice. 'Tis well for us that my old eyes are quick."

Not heeding the angry protests of the Frenchman, whose longing to send a word of greeting to a singer whose voice seemed to have reached him from a land far over-sea was driving him to desperate deeds, Noco led de Sancerre rapidly, by a circuitous path they had not trod before, toward the quarter of the sleeping town in which her hut awaited them. Beneath the ghastly sentinels grinning down at them from the temple's palisades they stole for a space, and then turned to pick their way toward Noco's home behind cabins which cast long shadows toward the east.

Stepping from the gloom into the moonlight, Noco, holding the Frenchman like a captive by the arm, was about to enter her hut with her rebellious guest when there arose around them, as if the earth had suddenly given birth to a night-

prowling priesthood, the white-robed figures of a score of silent men.

"What have we here?" exclaimed de Sancerre, breaking away from Noco's clutch, and drawing his rapier from its sheath. "My sword is fond of moonlight! Ask these ghostly cowards, señora, how they dare to dog the footsteps of the Brother of the Moon. Just say to them that in this blood-stained blade there's magic, made of silver-dust, to kill a thousand men."

"Be silent, señor," implored Noco. "I'll save you, if I can." Then, facing the chief priest, who towered above them a few paces in front of his silent and motionless brethren, she exclaimed, in the tongue of the sun-worshippers:

"What would you with this scion of the moon? He worships Coyocop."

"How know we that?" asked the chief priest, sternly, a bronze giant questioning a bronze dwarf surrounded by sentinels of bronze. In the very centre of the dusky, white-garbed group stood the pale, desperate Frenchman, his rapier pointed at an angle toward the ground, while his keen eyes, bold and unflinching, travelled defiantly from face to face of the scowling priests.

"What says the Inquisition? Will they dare the terrors of my hungry blade, señora?" cried de Sancerre, mockingly.

"'Tis dread of the gray chanter that inspires them," muttered Noco. Then she turned to the Frenchman. "I've told them that you worship Coyocop. They have no proof of it."

"Pardieu!" exclaimed the Frenchman, elevating his rapier. "The blood of a sulky Spaniard on this blade is proof enough. But, I have it! Say to his holiness, the chief priest, that I will scratch a message to the spirit of the sun upon a piece of bark. Bid him, in person, take it straight to Coyocop. If he obeys not what she says to him, the City of the Sun is doomed."

Quickly translating de Sancerre's defiant words into her native tongue, Noco, at a gesture from the chief priest, entered her hut. She was absent but a moment and, upon her return, handed a piece of virgin mulberry-wood to de Sancerre. Drawing his dagger from its sheath, the Frenchman scrawled these words upon the white bark:

"Louis de Sancerre, of Languedoc, sends greeting to Coyocop. Warn the bearer that my person must be sacred in the City of the Sun. To-morrow I will speak to you the words I cannot write."

Noco, without more ado, handed the note to the guardian of the sacred fire, who received it with evident reluctance. Ignorant of the art of writing, he looked upon the gleaming bark as a bit of moon-magic which might, at any moment,

cast upon him an evil spell. But, for the sake of his prestige with his order, he dared not give way to the dread which filled his superstitious soul. Stalking away, with Noco hurrying on behind him, he strode through the moonlight toward the house in which the spirit of the sun was lodged.

The minutes which preceded his return were like weary hours to the distraught Frenchman, surrounded, as he was, by pitiless faces from which black, piercing eyes seemed to singe his velvets with their spiteful gleams. A tattered courtier, with drawn sword, he stood there motionless, silent, awaiting with foreboding the return of his most influential foe. If fancy, or a fever begotten of a long and exciting day, had played him a trick; if the song of Coyocop had been voiced by Julia de Aquilar only in his imagination, he knew that he was doomed. Presently he drew from his bosom the piece of bark upon which was written the Spanish maiden's name. The sight revived his drooping courage. Whatever might be the explanation of the presence of Julia de Aquilar in this grim outland, his reason told him that his eyes and ears had not deceived him.

At that moment the chief priest, breaking through the circle of his subordinates, strode quickly toward de Sancerre. Falling upon his

knees, he raised his long arms toward the sky and uttered a harsh shout which was repeated by the onlooking priests.

"You are saved!" whispered the panting Noco, an instant later, to the Frenchman. "Coyocop has rescued you from death!"

Having paid homage to the misunderstood scion of the moon, the guardian of the sacred fire handed to de Sancerre the bark, within which the former had found no evil spell. Scrawled beneath the Frenchman's words were these:

"The Holy Mother has heard my prayers. All glory be to her for this strange miracle. I await your coming with a grateful heart. No harm can fall upon you, for I have warned the temple priest. May the saints guard you through the night.

"JULIA DE AQUILAR."

Turning to Noco, who had regained her breath, de Sancerre said:

"Say to this servant of the sun that I grant him pardon for his foolish threats. But warn him to take heed of how he walks. Unless he payeth abject homage to my power, it may go hard with him."

Waving his rapier 'til it flashed before the eyes of the overawed priest like a magic wand made of silvery moonbeams, de Sancerre strode with studied dignity toward Noco's hut, and disap-

peared from sight. The sun-priests, headed by their subdued chief, filed solemnly toward their blood-stained temple, and presently the moon, drooping toward the west, gazed down upon a city apparently abandoned by all men.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE BREAKS HIS FAST AND SMILES

Worn out with the exhausting experiences of long hours, unprecedented, even in his varied career, for the many contrasted emotions with which they had assailed him, de Sancerre had thrown himself, fully dressed, upon a bed of plaited reeds in Noco's hut, and, despite his inclination to muse upon the joy and wonder of the day's concluding episode, had fallen into a dreamless, restful sleep, which still wrapped him in its benign embrace long after the sun-god had blinked at the matutinal shouts with which the shining orb was greeted by its worshippers at dawn. The day was nearly ten hours of age before the Frenchman, stretching his arms and legs to their full length, awoke suddenly, and, with a smile upon his lips and a gleam of happiness in his eyes, recalled instantly the marvel which had made his present environment, with all its perils, a delight to his refreshed and ardent soul. Suddenly he discovered that while he slept his outer garments had been removed.

Turning on his side he raised his head, rested it upon his hand, and glanced toward the centre of the room, which still bore marks of the disorder begotten by the hasty flight of the disguised Franciscan and his charge.

Squatting upon the ground beside a bench, upon which rested de Sancerre's nether garments, sat old Noco, busily plying her fish-bone needle, while she repaired the many rents in his doublet and crooned a monotonous chant in a harsh, guttural voice. At the further end of the hut a crackling fire sent forth an odor which increased the satisfaction of the Frenchman with his surroundings. With corn-meal and fish, de Sancerre's hostess had prepared a repast which the most fastidious palate at Versailles would have found seductive. Upon a small bench at Noco's right hand stood a bowl of reddish crockery, in which wild strawberries awaited the pleasure of her guest.

"You will pardon me, señora," cried de Sancerre, gayly, "if I remark that my present plight is somewhat embarrassing. I shall be late at table unless my overworked wardrobe is restored to me at once."

"*Mas vale tarde que nunca!*" retorted the old hag, glancing inquiringly at the fire, and then resuming her patchwork. "You slept well, señor?"

"Like a log," answered de Sancerre—"a log saved from the sacred fire. And now, there is no time to lose! We have before us, Doña Noco, a busy day."

"Nay," returned his hostess, approaching his bedside with his rejuvenated garments upon her withered arm. "'Tis well to wait a while. When Cabanacte has returned, we'll hold a council and perfect a plan. It is not fitting that the Brother of the Moon should show himself at once. My people worship best the gods they do not see."

Again de Sancerre caught in Noco's eyes a mocking gleam which once before had placed him in close sympathy with her. That this old hag, whose mind was quick and clear, had, in her heart of hearts, discarded many of the ancient superstitions to which she outwardly conformed the Frenchman more than half suspected. But he spoke no further word to her until he had made a hasty toilet, and, refreshed by an application of cool water to his face and hands, had seated himself upon a bench to rejoice his inner man with strawberries, corn-cake, and skilfully-cooked fish. The variety of Noco's accomplishments filled de Sancerre with mingled admiration and astonishment. Speaking two languages, expert with her needle, an admirable cook, quick-witted, fertile in resource, the old

woman impressed the Frenchman that morning as a being well entitled to his respect and gratitude. But his mind dwelt no long time upon the praiseworthy versatility of his aged hostess. Impatient and impetuous by nature, he chafed sorely at inaction.

"Cabanacte!" he exclaimed, after he had satisfied his appetite, observing that Noco had disposed of the most exacting of her many tasks. "When think you, señora, your grandson will return?"

"When 'tis best for you, señor," answered the old woman, shortly.

"And 'twas he, Doña Noco, who found Coyocop, the spirit of the sun, by the shore of the great sea?"

"'Twas Cabanacte who found Coyocop, whose coming was foretold when the mountains were but hillocks, and bore her to the sacred City of the Sun."

"He found her by the sea alone?" asked de Sancerre, wonderingly.

"The Brother of the Moon should know all things," muttered Noco, with satire in her eyes and voice. Then she went on: "The white-faced children of the moon who bore her to our land lay sleeping on the beach, awaiting the coming of their god to waken them. But Cabanacte knew that she was Coyocop. And so, she came to us."

From outside the hut de Sancerre could hear the noises of a town astir, the tread of barefooted men upon the hardened earth, the cries of children at their play, and, now and then, the voices of women chattering of many wondrous things. He longed to make his way at once to Coyocop's abode that with his eyes he might assure himself that last night's strange adventures had not taken place in dreams. Even yet, he found it hard to believe that Julia de Aquilar was, in reality, a captive, like himself, in this weird town. But there lay her own handwriting on the bark! He read and reread the message which she had sent to him, and, turning toward Noco, asked, pensively:

"Coyocop, señora, seemed glad to learn that I was here?"

"I know not what the chief priest may have thought," croaked the old crone, a gleam of malice in her black eyes as they met de Sancerre's gaze, "but to me she seemed less like a goddess than a girl. She wept for joy to read your note."

De Sancerre sprang to his feet and paced up and down the hut restlessly.

"Cabanacte!" he exclaimed, petulantly. "*Nom de Dieu!* When will the man return?"

"We care not much for women in this land of ours," muttered Noco, using her broken Spanish

to tease her impatient guest. "Out of clay the Great Spirit moulded the first man, and, pleased with what he'd made, blew into him the breath of life. And thus he fell to sneezing, the first man, 'til from his nose there dropped a doll-shaped thing which set to dancing upon the ground there at his feet. And as she danced, she grew in size, until a woman stood before his eyes. It is not strange that man should make us work!" A sarcastic grin rested upon the hag's brown face as she gazed up at de Sancerre.

"But Coyocop is more than woman," cried de Sancerre, earnestly. "*Caramba!* But you love to torture me, señora! I say to you, beware! I know not what may lie the deepest in your heart, but this I say to you, 'twill serve you well to do your best for me. The time is coming when I'll pay you tenfold for your kindness now."

Noco drew near to the Frenchman and stood before him, listening for a time to the familiar noises outside her hut. Then she asked, in a tone which had no mischief in it:

"The Spanish, señor? Do you love them well?"

For a moment de Sancerre, startled by so unexpected an interrogatory, gazed down at the old hag, speechless. His suspicious mind strove in vain to find her motive for a question which

seemed to him, at first, to have no bearing upon the topics they had just discussed. But his intuitions told him that upon the answer he should make to her would depend her attitude toward him from this time forth. By one word, he well knew, he might destroy in an instant the goodwill of the one ally who could save him and Julia de Aquilar from the dangers which menaced them. Noco spoke Spanish, a tongue which, it seemed probable, she had learned from her immediate ancestors. That the Spaniards had treated the native Americans with great cruelty, de Sancerre had often heard. Was it possible that Noco had inherited a hatred for a race of oppressors from whom her forebears had fled in fear? On the chance that this might be, the Frenchman, hesitating only a moment, decided finally to tell the truth to his dusky inquisitor.

"Doña Noco," said de Sancerre, impressively, placing a hand upon the old crone's arm, "the Spanish are my dearest foes. Often have I led my men against them on the fields of war. I hold for them a hatred only less intense than the love I bear for Coyocop."

The dark, beady eyes of the beldame seemed to search de Sancerre's very soul. Suddenly she fell upon her knees, and, seizing his cold hand, pressed it to her shrivelled lips.

"I am your servant, señor—even unto death,"

she muttered, hoarsely. Then she sprang to her feet with marvellous agility and stood listening intently, as if the noise outside bore some new tale to her quick ears.

"'Tis Cabanacte!" she exclaimed. "And with him comes the sister of the foolish man they slew."

Hardly had de Sancerre grasped the significance of her words, when Katonah, followed by Noco's grandson, stole into the hut, panting as if their journey had been a hurried one.

"*Bienvenue*, Katonah!" cried de Sancerre, a note of mingled annoyance and surprise in his voice. "I did not think to see you here again. You bring me word from Sieur de la Salle?"

Katonah's sensitive ear caught the hollow sound in the Frenchman's word of welcome. The suggestion of a sad smile played across her weary face, as she said:

"The great captain urged me not to come. But, monsieur, I was so lonely! With you and Chatémuc not there, I could not stay." A suppressed sob checked her words. Handing to de Sancerre a note from de la Salle, the Mohican maiden seated herself upon a bench and gazed mournfully at the glowing embers of Noco's dying fire.

"*Ma foi*, Cabanacte, I'm glad to see your giant form again!" cried de Sancerre, smiling as

he perused de la Salle's epistle. It ran as follows:

"Let this chance, monsieur, to serve your king atone for your disobedience to me. Be firm, unbending, and conservative. Well I know that you will be courageous. Await me where you are. I return shortly, and will send for you. I must teach the mouth of this great river to speak the name of France. I go to ring the knell of Spain! *Adieu et au revoir!*

"De la Salle."

"*Bien!*" exclaimed de Sancerre, kissing his hand to old Noco, smilingly. "We hold the cards we need. 'Twill be my fault if blunders now should lose the game we play."

The old woman had come to the side of her eccentric guest.

"My captain," went on de Sancerre, in a lower tone, "a brother of the moon-god, like myself, tells me in this note that he goes to seize a kingdom from our Spanish foes. You are content, señora? You are content?"

"Aye, señor, well content!" answered the old hag with grim emphasis.

"And now," exclaimed the Frenchman, beckoning to Cabanacte to approach them, "we'll hold a solemn council, for the truth is this: unless I soon have speech with Coyocop, my throbbing heart will thump itself to death. Tell me, Cabanacte, is there danger for yon maiden, whose brother died the death?"

The bronze athlete had stretched himself at de Sancerre's feet in such a position that he could fix his gaze upon the sombre beauty of Katonah's face. He showed his perfect teeth, and his black eyes gleamed as he answered:

"Danger for her? No, none! Not while Cabanacte lives."

De Sancerre smiled gayly. Cabanacte's answer had delighted him.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE HEARS NEWS OF THE GREAT SUN

The Count de Sancerre's desire to come to an immediate decision regarding a line of action that should lead him at once into the living presence of Coyocop was not to be gratified. Noco's sensitive ear, acting as a thermometer to register the degree of excitement prevailing outside her cabin, had heard an ominous murmur that had lost none of its threatening significance because it had come from afar. She knew at once that a crowd of gossiping sun-worshippers, inspired by some new rumor, had gathered in the great square near the temple of the sun. Hurrying to her grandson's side, she said:

"Go forth at once, Cabanacte, and mingle with the throng outside. There's news abroad which makes the city talk. Return to us when you have learned the meaning of the uproar in the square."

The dark-hued colossus reluctantly arose and

stood, for a moment, listening to the increasing disturbance among his easily-excited neighbors. Hurrying feet, making toward the temple of the sun and the King's cabin, echoed from the street just outside the hut. The pattering footsteps of chattering women and children mingled with the louder tread of stalwart men, aroused from their siesta by an epidemic of distrust. Cabanacte, dismayed at the grim possibilities suggested by this unwonted demonstration upon the part of a people little given to activity at noonday, bent down to Noco before obeying her behest.

"Secrete the maiden where no prying eye can see her," he murmured, hoarsely, still gazing at Katonah. "I'll join the rabble and return at once. I dread the cruel fervor of our priests. But still they cannot know that it was her brother whom they killed?"

"Stop not to make conjecture, Cabanacte," scolded the old crone, pushing her grandson toward the hut's ignoble exit. "I say to you, 'tis not Katonah who has made the city talk. 'Tis some calamity—I know not what."

Without more ado, the tall sun-worshipper crawled from the twilight of the hut into the burning sunshine of the agitated street, and, drawing himself erect, joined the gossiping throng which poured noisily toward the great square. To Cabanacte's great surprise and re-

lief, his appearance in the open caused no added excitement among the bronze-faced, eager-eyed men and women who hurried by his side toward the centre of the town. It became evident to him at once that the news which awaited him beyond had nothing to do with the strangers whom he had left in the hut behind him.

Meanwhile de Sancerre, vexed at the delay to which a mercurial people had forced him to submit, gazed despondently now at Noco and now at Katonah. French expletives, colored by a Spanish oath at times, escaped from his erstwhile smiling mouth. Noco had stationed herself at the entrance to the cabin, endeavoring to catch the echo of some enlightening rumor as it flew back from the crowded square. Katonah, watching the Frenchman with eyes which seemed to implore his forgiveness, had withdrawn to a remote corner of the room and seated herself wearily upon a wooden bench. If she had heard a menace to herself in the uproar in the town, she gave no outward indication of the dread that her heart might feel. With the proud shyness of a sensitive girl, and the external stoicism of an Indian, she withdrew, as far as was possible, from the presence of her companions and made no further sign. Had Zenobe Membré known that at this ominous juncture Katonah had murmured no prayer, no invocation to the saints, the sanguine

Franciscan would have marvelled, perhaps wept, at the mighty gulf which stretched between the martyred Chatémuc, secure in Paradise, and a melancholy maiden who had known the faith and lost it.

The chagrined Frenchman, fully realizing his own impotence at this mysterious crisis, presently arose and began to pace the room with impatient steps. He felt like a man to whom some unexpected and glowing promise had been given by destiny, to be withdrawn almost at the moment of its presentation. During the long, weary hour which followed Cabanacte's departure from the hut, de Sancerre's mind vibrated between hope and despair. Had he made the amazing discovery of Julia de Aquilar's presence in the City of the Sun only that it might mock him for his lack of power? Could it be that fate had lured him in malice within sound of her sweet voice to hurl him into the lonely silence of the wilderness at last? And to himself he swore an oath that he would never leave the City of the Sun alive unless the Spanish maiden fled with him to the wilds. Death in the effort to save her from years of hopeless captivity was preferable, a thousand times, to life and freedom and a vain regret. How well he loved this woman de Sancerre had never known before. For the first time this *mondain*, who had fondly imagined

that life had nothing new to give him, realized the might and majesty of a great passion, and his soul grew sick with the fear that its ecstasy might change to misery at last.

But while de Sancerre's mind dwelt fondly upon the joy of an all-absorbing love, it endeavored, at the same time, to make an inventory of the actual and the possible dangers which he would be compelled to confront before he could indulge the hope that the love he welcomed would ever fulfil the promise which it held within itself.

Weeks must pass before de la Salle could return from his voyage to the gulf. Even then the explorer had at his command no force with which to overcome these martial and stalwart sun-worshippers. De Sancerre's only hope lay in diplomacy and craft. It was essential to the success of his scheme, whose general outlines were already forming in his mind, that the superstitious tendencies of the people surrounding him be used as a tool for forging his escape. But their fanaticism was a double-edged instrument which must be handled with the nicest care or it would turn within his hands and destroy him at a blow.

Coyocop? How far could he trust her quickness and discretion? That she possessed both of these qualities he was inclined to believe. One

of her greatest charms in the blithesome days at Versailles had consisted in her ready responsiveness to his changing moods, in the keenness of a mind which shone to advantage even in that centre of the great world's sharpest wit. As for her discretion, had it not been proved by the fact that she had maintained for many months her alien authority over these fickle, jealous, sharp-eyed people? Furthermore—and de Sancerre lingered over the mystery with much concern—she had, during that same period, managed to conceal from the keen-witted and revengeful Noco the fact that her origin was Spanish, not divine. How well the girl must have played a most exacting part to deceive the eccentric old hag, de Sancerre fully realized. That in Julia de Aquilar he would find an ally well-fitted to play the rôle which he had in mind for her, her skill in blinding Noco gave good proof. But, at the best, de Sancerre's growing project must win the full fruition of success much more by chance than by design. Even before he took initial steps, he must learn what new excitement had aroused the lazy town at noon.

"*Peste!*" he exclaimed, fretfully. "It was no victory to outrun Cabanacte. His heavy limbs are slower than a Prussian's wits."

At that very instant the hole beside which

Noco lurked was darkened by her grandson's stooping form. Drawing himself erect, after he had pulled his long limbs into the hut, Cabanacte glanced searchingly around the room until his black eyes lighted upon the self-absorbed Katonah. Then, followed by Noco, he strode toward de Sancerre.

"There is no danger to the girl," muttered the giant, as he seated himself upon a bench, which groaned in protest beneath his weight. "But I bring to you bad news."

"*Ma foi*, you look it!" exclaimed de Sancerre to himself, scanning the troubled countenance of the dusky youth.

Turning to Noco, Cabanacte poured forth rapidly in his native tongue the sombre story which he had heard abroad, and then stood erect, gazing at Katonah.

"The Great Sun lies dying!" exclaimed the old woman, excitedly, turning from her grandson to her guest. "In perfect health at sunrise, he fell near noonday, and none can make him speak."

De Sancerre had sprung to his feet and was glancing alternately down at Noco and up at Cabanacte. The menacing significance of the misfortune which had fallen upon the King appeared to him at once. Had evil come to the Great Sun in some way not readily explainable,

the crafty sun-priests would lay his sickness to the blighting influence of the stranger's magic, the fatal witchery brought with him from the moon.

"He's dying, do you say? There is no hope?" gasped the Frenchman, looking into Noco's eyes for a ray of encouragement.

"He's dying as his mother died," muttered the old crone, musingly, seemingly forgetful of de Sancerre's presence. "But, even then, he had long years to live. And yesterday he looked no older than my Cabanacte there."

"He's dying, do you say?" repeated the Frenchman, mechanically.

"Aye, dying, señor," hissed the beldame, spitefully. "And now the temple priests prepare the cords with which they'll choke his servants and his wives to death. No Great Sun goes alone into the land beyond! What sights my eyes have seen! King follows king into the spirit-world, and with them go the best and noblest of our weeping race. Aye, señor, the Great Sun's dying and the city mourns. When he has passed, his household follows him. The sight you saw but yesternight was child's-play for the priests. 'Tis when a Great Sun dies they have man's sport with death."

The mocking, angry tones in Noco's guttural voice made the broken Spanish in which she

spoke impress the Frenchman's ears as a most repellent tongue. De Sancerre was striving feverishly to grasp the full significance of her grim words, to weigh in all its bearings the new exigency which had increased a hundredfold the peril in which he stood. But the thought beset him, with tyrannical persistence, that he had no time to lose. Should the Great Sun die at once, de Sancerre would be powerless against any revenge which the sun-priests might, in their crafty cruelty, seek to take. How far the homage which they paid to Coyoccp could be trusted to save him in the crisis which would follow the King's death he could not determine, but he had begun to fear that not only the priests but the people at large would hold him responsible for the sudden and mysterious blow which had fallen upon the throne. With little time at his disposal in which to examine the crisis from many points of view, de Sancerre came quickly to the conclusion that his doom was sealed unless he acted with boldness, decision, and rapidity. Satisfied of the loyalty of Noco and Cabanacte, although he marvelled somewhat at their good-will, he drew himself up to his full height, and, putting up his hand to command silence, said:

"Go forth at once, Cabanacte, and tell the people of this afflicted town that it was the insult cast upon me by the temple priests which

brought down the wrath of Heaven upon the Great Sun's head. Tell this to the rabble. Then go to the chief priest and say to him that he, too, shall fall with suddenness before his fire unless he heeds the words that I shall speak. Bid him be silent 'til I come to him, and to keep his priests at prayer. *Nom de Dieu*, my Cabanacte, have you lost your ears? Stop staring at me and go forth at once, or, with the ease with which my legs outran you, I'll strike you dead with this!"

Waving his rapier threateningly at the giant's panting breast, de Sancerre drove the startled athlete through the entrance to the street, and then turned back to seize the trembling Noco by the arm.

"I have a message which you must take to Coyocop! If you should fail to gain her ear, the City of the Sun is doomed. Say this to her, that when I send a priest to summon her she must be quick to join me at the Great Sun's lodge. Repeat my words, señora."

Shaking the old crone roughly by the arm, de Sancerre bent down to catch her gasping voice.

"*Bien!*" he cried, "you've conned your lesson well! Go, now, señora, and make no mistake! If you would save your dying king, see Coyocop and tell her what I say."

In another instant the panting Noco, grum-

bling but overawed, had left the hut upon a mission for which she had no hungry heart.

De Sancerre drew back from the entrance, and dropped limply upon a bench. He had put into operation a hastily-formed plan with an impetuosity which, in its rebound, left him faint and dazed. Suddenly a warm pressure upon his cold hands aroused him from his momentary submission to this enervating reaction. Looking down, he saw that Katonah was gazing up at him with sympathetic apprehension.

"I have placed you in great danger by my return!" she exclaimed. "I am going now. I will not come back."

She had arisen and was about to leave the hut. Seizing her hand, de Sancerre drew her to his side.

"No, *ma petite!* You are not at fault! Don't leave me—but do not speak! I must think—I must think! But my mind's in a whirl. *Courage.* Katonah! There, do not tremble so! *Ma foi,* little one, 'tis a hard nut we have to crack! There, do not move! Let me take your hand. *Bien!* Now, let me think!"

Silence, intense, unbroken, reigned within the hut; while, outside, the hot sun beat down upon a city in which rumor itself had become voiceless in growing dread of a fatal word.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH COHEYOGO EXHIBITS HIS CRAFTINESS

While the Great Sun, by virtue of his divine origin, was technically the high-priest of the nation, it had come about, at the time of Count Louis de Sancerre's sojourn among the sun-worshippers, that the chief of the holy men, upon whom devolved the duty of keeping alive the sacred fire, had, by the strength of his bigoted personality, usurped all religious authority and had made the temple independent of, and more potent than, the royal cabin. While the chief priest had never openly defied the Great Sun, he had, nevertheless, gradually become the most influential personage in the nation.

It was the advent of Coyocop which had given to Coheyogo, the chief priest, an opportunity for making himself, with no visible break between the church and state, practically omnipotent in the City of the Sun.

Just how thoroughly Coheyogo believed that Julia de Aquilar was the very incarnation of the sun-spirit which, tradition had assured his peo-

ple, would come to them from the shore of a distant sea, it is impossible to say. It is a fact, however, that from the moment of her arrival among the sun-worshippers the chief priest had openly accepted the maiden as a supernatural guest from whom emanated an authority which he and his fellow-priests were in duty bound to obey. For the furtherance of his own ends and the increase of his own power, the crafty Coheyogo could have taken no better course.

It had come about that Noco as interpreter—the connecting link between the spirit of the sun and the chief priest of the temple—had found herself in a position of great influence. The old hag, a compound of superstition, spitefulness, and saturnine humor done up in a crumpled brown package, had derived malicious satisfaction from playing Coheyogo's game with a skill and an audacity which had saved her from the many perils which had menaced her in the pursuit of this eccentric pastime.

Coheyogo would visit Coyocop with Noco and lay before the sun-spirit some problem dealing with the attitude of the temple toward a question at that moment interesting the sun-worshippers. The quick-witted and fearless interpreter would answer the chief priest with advice originating in her own fertile brain, and, in this way, would protect Coyocop from cares of state, while she

made a willing tool of Coheyogo and satisfied her own love of mischief. Within well-defined limitations, old Noco, at the moment of which we write, held under her control more actual power than either the Great Sun or the chief priest. As the tongue of Coyocop, the court of last resort in a priest-ridden state, the old crone, with little fear of detection, could put into the mouth of the sun-spirit whatever words she chose. Fortunately for Coyocop and the sun-worshippers, the aged linguist was, at heart, progressive rather than reactionary. She had cherished for years a detestation for the bloody sacrifices of the temple, which heterodoxy, had Coheyogo suspected it, would have long ago brought her life to a sudden end. As it was, the old interpreter had made use of Coyocop to mitigate, as far as possible, the horrors which a cruel cult, administered by heartless priests, had inflicted upon a brave, kindly, but too plastic race.

It was now a full hour past high noon, and Coheyogo stood, surrounded by the temple priests, confronting Cabanacte by the sacred fire. The interior of the sun-temple was not less repulsive to an unbiassed eye than the skull-crowned palisades outside. Divided into two rooms of unequal size, the interior of the blood-stained fane served the double purpose of a gigantic oven to keep the veins of the living at fever-heat

and of a tomb in which the bones of the noble dead might crumble into dust. In the larger of the two rooms, in which the chief priest was now holding a council of the elders, stood an altar seven feet long by two in width and rising to a height of four feet above the floor. Upon this altar rested a long, hand-painted basket in which reposed the remains of the reigning Great Sun's immediate predecessor.

The heat of the room was intense, for no windows broke the monotony of the temple's walls; mud-baked partitions, nine inches in thickness. Rows of plaited mats covered the arched ceiling of the interior. At the end of the room furthest from the sacred fire, folding doors, closed at this moment, opened into the private apartments of the chief priest. Running from these doors, along both sides of the smoke-blackened hall, wooden shelves supported the grewsome relics of horrid ceremonials. Long lines of baskets, daubed with red and yellow paint, contained the revered dust of Great Suns gone into the land of spirits accompanied by the loyal souls of their strangled wives and retainers. Scattered between these tawdry urns, the shelves bore crudely-wrought clay figures of men, women, serpents, owls, and eagles; and here and there an offering of fruit, meat, or fish stood ready to satisfy the craving of any uneasy ghost coming back

dissatisfied with the cuisine of the spirit-world.

Grouped around the sacred fire, in which logs of oak and walnut preserved a flame which the sun-god had vouchsafed to man in a remote day of grace, the temple priests, whose dark faces bore evidence of their internal agitation, stood listening and watching as Cabanacte and Coheyogo faced each other at this crisis and discussed, in subdued tones, a question of immediate significance. As the chosen discoverer of Coyocop, the instrument employed by the great spirit for the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy, Cabanacte occupied an influential position in the eyes of the temple brotherhood. The inspiration from on high, which had turned the giant's feet toward a haunted shingle upon which the spirit of the sun lay asleep, might at any moment stir his tongue with words of divine origin. Since the night upon which Cabanacte had brought Coyocop to the City of the Sun, he had always been listened to with rapt attention by the jealous guardians of the sacred fire.

"He threatens me, you say?" muttered Coheyogo angrily, gazing up at Cabanacte with flashing eyes. "And you have told the people that the Great Sun dies because I do not worship this white-faced conjurer who says the moon is his? Beware, oh Cabanacte, what you do! I'll

dare the magic of his silver wand and prove to him the sun-god is omnipotent."

Drawing himself up to his full height, until he towered a full half-foot above the stately sun-priest, Cabanacte exclaimed, in a low, insistent voice:

"Have you forgotten Coyocop? Did she not last night—old Noco tells the tale—command you to do honor to this white face from the moon? 'Tis you, Coheyogo, who should now take heed. 'Tis not moon-magic which you would defy. 'Tis Coyocop herself, the spirit of the sun, our god."

The chief priest remained silent for a time, gazing thoughtfully at the sacred fire, which seemed to roar and flash and snap and dance before his restless black eyes as if it threatened him with tortures for harboring a sacrilegious thought. Had not the spirit of the sun itself, through Coyocop's inspired tongue, commanded him to treat the nation's white-faced guest with all respect? The great power which Coheyogo had wielded for a year seemed to be slipping from his grasp. Its foundation-stone had been the word of Coyocop. Should he not heed her late behest he'd pull the very underpinning from beneath his tower of strength. Furthermore, the Great Sun, an easy-going monarch, subservient to the chief priest's stronger will, lay at death's

door. His successor to the throne, his sister's son, Manatte, was a headstrong, stubborn youth, upon whom the influence of Coheyogo was but slight. Should the chief priest lose at one stroke the countenance of Coyocop and the good-will of the Great Sun, the supremacy of the temple would be destroyed upon the instant, and Coheyogo would find himself hurled from a pinnacle of power to a grovelling attitude among a people chafing under the cruel tyranny of a bloodthirsty priesthood. Turning fretfully from the threatening blaze to glance up again at the steady eyes of Cabanacte, the chief priest said:

"The words of Coyocop come straight from God." Facing then the expectant priests, he cried sternly: "Go forth, my brothers, and bid the people to disperse at once. Tell them to go to their homes and offer prayers that the Great Sun may be spared to us. Then come to me here, for I have other work for you to do."

Left alone in the stifling room with Cabanacte, the chief priest went on:

"Direct the moon-man and old Noco to attend me here. If yonder white face has no evil wish, it may be that his magic may save our king from death."

Cabanacte smiled grimly.

"I know not, Coheyogo," he remarked, as he turned toward the exit to the temple, "that the

envoy from the moon will heed your curt command. But this I do believe, that, if besought, he'd use his greatest power to save our Sun alive. I will return to you at once."

With these words the dusky giant strode past the hideous, grinning idols of baked clay, and the plaited coffins of the royal dead, and made his way to the great square from which the white-robed priests were driving an awestruck, moaning people to their homes.

Coheyogo, glancing furtively around the deserted hall in which the spectres of the dead seemed ready to chase the flickering shadows cast by the miraculous fire, bent down and threw a huge log into the mocking flame, as if to quiet for a moment its spiteful, chiding voice. Suddenly behind him he heard the stealthy footfall of a white-robed underling. Turning quickly from the fire, Coheyogo's piercing eyes rested upon a priest whom he had recently despatched to the Great Sun's cabin.

"What news?" cried the chief priest, eagerly. "He still lives?"

"Magani! Listen, master! He lives, and, tossing on his bed, mutters strange words beneath his breath. 'Tis a devil that is in him, for he talks of things we cannot see."

"And his physician?" asked Coheyogo, impatiently.

"He has done his best, but his eyes are wild and he shakes his head in impotence."

"He'll shake it in the noose should the Great Sun die," muttered the chief priest, with cruel emphasis. "What boots his boasted skill if he fails us when we need him most? But, hark! Our brothers have returned."

Filing into the temple like a procession of white ghosts with charred faces, the priests of the sun grouped themselves in a circle behind their chief, and stood awaiting in silence the outcome of a crisis which might, at its worst, satisfy their ever-present craving for human sacrifices to offer to their god, the innocent and genial orb of day. That the cruel and crafty Coheyogo dreaded the news of the Great Sun's death more keenly than they, in their love for an inhuman custom, desired it, they had no means of knowing. But they were to learn presently that there was a new force at work in their city with which they had never before been called upon to deal. As they stood there silent, eager-eyed, remorseless, longing for a continuance of the thrilling sport for which the death of Chatémuc had but whetted their appetites, the sound of light, dainty footsteps approaching the entrance to the temple reached their quick ears. Turning toward the doorway at the further end of the hall, Coheyogo and his motionless and noiseless brood gazed

upon an approaching figure which, in spite of its lack of size, was most impressive at that fateful moment. De Sancerre had donned a flowing garment of white mulberry bark, which hid his gay velvets from view and fell in graceful lines from his neck to his feet. His head was bare, and his hair, a picturesque mixture of black and gray, emphasized the pleasing contour of his pale, clean-cut face.

With drawn rapier, the symbol of his dreaded moon-magic, the French aristocrat, his eyes fixed upon the chief priest, strode solemnly toward the sacred fire, followed at a distance by Noco and her long-limbed grandson. As he came to a halt in front of Coheyogo, de Sancerre raised the hilt of his sword to his chin and made a graceful, sweeping salute with the weapon. Turning to Noco, who had now reached his side, he said to her:

"Say to the chief priest that I come to him in amity or in defiance, as he may choose. Tell him that the Brother of the Moon makes no idle boasts, but that 'tis safer for the City of the Sun to win his friendship than to arouse his wrath."

Coheyogo, with a face which none could read, listened attentively to the old crone's defiant words. His black eyes held the Frenchman's gaze to his. There was something in the latter's glance that exercised upon the sun-worshipper

"COOL, MOTIONLESS, WITH UNFLINCHING EYES, THE FRENCHMAN STOOD WATCHING THE CHIEF PRIEST."

a potent fascination, an influence more effective than the impression made upon him by Noco's speech. The lower type of man succumbed, in spite of his physical superiority, to the will-power of a higher and more complicated intellect than his own. Even had Coheyogo considered it expedient at that moment to wreak summary vengeance upon his white-faced, smiling challenger, it is to be doubted that his tongue could have uttered the words which would have sent de Sancerre to his doom. Cool, motionless, with unflinching eyes and a mouth which wore the outlines of a derisive smile, the undersized Frenchman stood watching the chief priest, outwardly as self-confident as if he had possessed, in reality, the destructive power of which he boasted. Presently Coheyogo turned to Noco, whose wrinkled countenance was twitching with excitement in the fitful glow of the sacred fire.

"The Chief Priest of the Sun has no quarrel with the Brother of the Moon," said the old hag, addressing de Sancerre a moment later. "But he says to him that the Great Sun, in health and strength at sunrise, now lies tossing in peril of his life. Is it true, he asks, that you have threatened to bring down the same strange sickness upon the temple priests?"

"Not if they do the bidding of Coyocop, the spirit of the sun," answered de Sancerre, curtly,

closely scanning Coheyogo's face as Noco repeated his words. Then he turned to the interpreter and went on:

"Let the chief priest understand that the spirit of the sun and the spirit of the moon go hand in hand, to the greater glory of the God of gods. Say to him that together Coyocop and I can make a nation great or destroy it at a word. Disobedience to us is impiety to God. If he, Coheyogo, would know this truth, he must be docile, patient, and abide my time. If in his mind the shadow of a doubt remains that what I say is true, let him recall the legends of his race, the promises and prophecies which your fathers told their sons."

There reigned an ominous silence in the stifling, ill-smelling room for a time, broken only by the malicious crackling of the sacred fire or the impatient grunt of some overwrought priest. Coheyogo, fearing to lose his power by accepting the proffered alliance, but too superstitious to defy the unseen rulers of the universe by rejecting it, stood, grim and self-absorbed, scanning a distressing problem from many points of view. He dared not offend Coyocop, but he resented de Sancerre's claim to a share in the supernatural authority which the sun-worshippers had attributed to her. After long reflection, the chief priest looked down at the grinning Noco and said:

"Say to the Brother of the Moon that if he has sufficient power to bring down destruction upon this City of the Sun, or even to cast an evil spell upon our king, he is wise enough to cure the latter of the sickness which has laid him low. If he will lead the Great Sun back to us from the very gates of death, he will find within this temple none but servants glad to pay him homage and obey his words. But, if he fails to raise our king, 'twill prove to us he either boasts too much or bears us no good will."

De Sancerre's lips turned a shade lighter, but the mocking smile did not desert them, as Noco translated Coheyogo's ultimatum into her clumsy Spanish. But even in that moment of supreme dismay, when his life, so he reflected, had been staked against loaded dice, the Frenchman could not refrain from casting a glance of admiration at the crafty priest who had played his game so well. If de Sancerre should undertake the restoration of the Great Sun's health and should fail to save his life, even Coyocop would be powerless to protect him from the fate which had befallen Chatémuc. He had planned to visit the sick-bed of the King, and to send for Julia de Aquilar to meet him there, should he find that the Great Sun lay afflicted by no contagious disease. But de Sancerre had not foreseen that his boastfulness—which had served him well at

times—would place him in his present plight, making his very life dependent upon his skill as a physician. He dared not hesitate, however, to accept the gauntlet thrown down by the keen-witted schemer, whose black eyes were now fixed upon him with a sardonic, defiant gleam.

"It will give me great joy to restore my friend, the ruler of this land, to health," said de Sancerre calmly to Noco, his gaze still meeting Coheyogo's unwaveringly. "Will you request the chief priest to accompany me to the royal bedside?"

With these words, the Frenchman turned his back upon the sacred fire and its jealous guardian, and strode haughtily toward the temple's exit.

"*Nom de Dieu*," he muttered to himself, "I know more about the slaying of my fellowmen than how to save them from the jaws of death! I would I could recall the odds and ends of medicine I've gathered in my time! But, even then, I fear my skill would not suffice. The Great Sun, if I mistake not, has no more to gain from me than I from him. St. Maturin, be kind to us!"

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH A WHITE ROBE FAILS TO PROTECT A BLACK HEART

Seated upon a low couch of plaited reeds, Julia de Aquilar, her white, slender hands folded upon her lap, and her dark, eloquent eyes turned upward as if they rested upon the Virgin Mother's face, listened for the footsteps of a worldling and a sceptic, whose irreverent tongue had often in her hearing made sport of love itself. Her year in captivity as a celestial guide and counsellor to a half-savage race had softened, while preserving, the splendid coloring of her flawless complexion. Paler than of old, her face had lost none of its marvellous symmetry, and the warm hue of her curving lips bore witness to the triumph which youth, in its abounding elasticity, had won over the allied forces of loneliness and despair. The shadows beneath her expectant eyes had but added to their glowing splendor. Long days and nights of revery and introspection had changed the dominant expression of her face, somewhat too haughty afore-

time, and a gentle radiance seemed to emanate from a countenance which had gained an added fascination from the spiritualizing touches of a sorrow too deep for tears.

The room in which Doña Julia sat at this moment, watching and praying for a rescuer whose advent had been made possible only through a miracle vouchsafed by Mary and the saints, testified to the homage which was paid by the sun-worshippers to the spirit, Coyocop. Bunches of early spring flowers, borne to her cabin by devotees who had never looked upon her face, were scattered in profusion upon the earthen floor and along the wooden shelves fitted into the gray walls. Offerings of dried fruits, and more substantial edibles, indicated the anxiety of an afflicted people to propitiate the unseen powers in this day of peril to their prostrate chief. Fabrics woven with commendable skill in various colors, and bits of pottery showing artistic possibilities in the makers thereof, added to the polychromatic ensemble of Coyocop's sacred retreat. At that very instant Doña Julia could hear the murmurs of a group of devout sun-worshippers, who had come from the budding forest to pile before her door great heaps of magnolia blossoms to bear witness to their reverence for the beneficent spirit of the sun, and to their hope that she would save them from

their threatening doom. The skull-bedecked temple of the sun stood for all that was most savage in a cult demanding human blood. The hut of Coyocop, wellnigh hidden from the noonday by sacrificial flowers, gave forth a fragrant incense which arose from an altar built of loving hearts.

It was the assurance, which had come to her in many ways, that she possessed the reverential affection of thousands of men and women upon whom she had never gazed that had lightened Doña Julia's captivity, and had vouchsafed to her lonely soul a source of inspiration without which her faith in heaven might have lost its strength. Horrified to find herself worshipped as a goddess, but fearful of the fate which might befall her should she make denial of her divinity, she had passed long months in silent misery, theoretically omnipotent, but practically a helpless captive; used, for their own selfish purposes, by a few schemers, and adored at a distance by priest-ridden thousands who cherished, in their heart of hearts, the hope that Coyocop would mitigate the cruel cult which stained their temple red.

The Great Sun came in state to visit her at times, and, more often, Manatte, his nephew and heir-apparent, presuming upon his royal prerogatives, would enter her cabin to feast his black

eyes upon the beauty of a countenance which he was bound to look upon as sacred from the touch of human lips. The tall, dusky youth, whose handsome, wilful face Doña Julia had grown to loathe, had never dared to rebel against the restraints which Coyocop's divine origin forced upon him, but his restless eyes told the girl what was in his protesting heart, and she would watch his reluctant steps, as he stole from her hut, with mingled relief and dread. Well she knew that fear of the Brother of the Sun and of the chief priest alone prevented Manatte from defying the Great Spirit and making her his own.

The afternoon was growing old, and Doña Julia, with a bunch of white flowers upon her bosom, relieving the black monotony of her sombre garb, still awaited in loneliness the coming of Louis de Sancerre, whose presence in that remote corner of the globe only the saints in heaven could explain. That Coheyogo and Noco, who came to her daily to play a solemn farce in which she had long ago lost all interest, had not made their accustomed advent to her cabin filled her with increasing alarm. The uproar in the city at noon-day, the mournful outcries of an agitated people, had aroused in Doña Julia's soul a dread foreboding which the subsequent silence which had fallen upon the hysterical town had done nothing to relieve.

Presently the overwrought girl, from whose lips the cup of hope seemed to have been snatched just as she was about to drink deep of its grateful draught, fell upon her knees beside her bed and breathed a fervent prayer to the Mother of Christ for strength in this hour of doubt and discouragement. Soothed by her devotions, she arose and, standing erect, listened for the sound of a footstep which should precede an answer to her supplication; but an ominous silence reigned outside her hut. Readjusting the flowers upon her breast, and smoothing her rebellious, raven hair with a trembling hand, Doña Julia, cold with a sense of loneliness which had fallen upon her heart, moved hesitatingly toward the hole which served as a clumsy entrance to the room. Bending down, her hungry eyes eagerly scanned the deserted square, upon which the sun was shining as if in search of its secreted worshippers. To the overpowering sweetness of the spring blossoms, lying in heaps outside the doorway, she gave no heed, as she sought in vain for signs of life in a city upon which the blight of a great fear had recently descended. Suddenly, as Doña Julia gazed in consternation at this lonely centre of a populous town, a tall form issued from the cabin of the Great Sun. Drawing himself up to his full height, the man, glancing in all directions, as if to assure himself

that he was unobserved, made straight toward the hole in the sun-baked wall through which the girl was peering. The white feathers in his hair bore witness to his royal rank, and as he came into the full glare of the sunlight just beyond her cabin Doña Julia saw that her approaching visitor was Manatte. To rush forth into the square and arouse the city by her cries was her first impulse, but before she could give way to it the youth had cut off her escape.

"Coyocop!" he exclaimed, as he stood erect, after he had crawled through the entrance, driving her back in affright toward the centre of the flower-bedecked room. "Coyocop!"

There were in his voice passion, triumph, desperation; an appeal to the woman and a defiance to the gods. The Great Sun lay dying. Even the chief priest would hesitate to offend him—Manatte, who would soon be king!

"Coyocop!" he repeated more gently, holding forth to her a hand, like a beggar asking alms, while his eyes rested upon the white flowers which rose and fell upon her throbbing bosom.

But, though her body trembled, there was no flinching in Doña Julia's glance. Hopeless, as she was, for she realized that sacrilege such as this could spring only from an opportunity in which Manatte could find no peril, her eyes gazed into his with a proud scorn which left no

need for words. With head thrown back, she strove to conquer the brute nature of the youth by the mere force of her strong will and the purity of her virgin soul. But she knew full well that the silent prayers which she offered up to God would reach His throne too late.

For a moment they stood thus confronting one another; Purity attired in black, and License enrobed in spotless white. Never afterward could Julia de Aquilar sense the sweet, haunting odor of magnolia blossoms without a sinking of the heart which made her breath protest. No sound broke the intense stillness save the twittering of birds which wooed the flowers outside the hut and the stifled words which Manatte strove to speak. Suddenly he sprang toward her and seized her wrists, while his bronze face burned her cold, white cheeks.

"Coyocop," he muttered, in a tongue which she could not understand, "you shall be mine, 'though every star the midnight sky reveals should send a god to save you from my love!"

A maiden's despairing cry startled the silent town.

"Mother of God, have mercy! Help! O Christ, save me!"

A light, nervous footfall echoed from the square, and the entrance to the hut was darkened for an instant. Rapier in hand, de Sancerre

sprang into the centre of the room. As Manatte, with an oath upon his swollen lips, turned upon the intruder, the Frenchman drove his sword straight through a snow-white robe into a black heart. Without a groan, the evil scion of a royal race fell dead upon the ground.

"Thank God, I came in time!" exclaimed de Sancerre, as he withdrew his rapier from Manatte's breast and turned toward Doña Julia, who, faint and breathless, leaned against the wall facing him. "Doña Julia de Aquilar," he cried, tossing his dripping sword to the ground and crossing the room at a stride, "I kiss your hand." Falling upon one knee the courtier pressed his lips to the cold, trembling fingers in his grasp.

"Mother of Mary, I thank thee for thy care," murmured Doña Julia raising her eyes to heaven from the smiling, upturned face of de Sancerre.

It was upon a tableau which might have suggested, to other eyes, a worldling praying to a saint for pardon for the murder of a giant that Coheyogo, followed by Noco and Cabanacte, gazed as he entered the hut and attempted to read the story of the grim picture by which he was confronted. De Sancerre, who had doffed his white robes in the Great Sun's cabin, still knelt at the feet of the pale and agitated girl. Near the centre of the room lay the bleeding, motionless body of the sacrilegious sun-worship-

per. Thrown from a shelf by the recent tumult in the room, a great bunch of magnolia blossoms lay scattered close to Manatte's head, a floral halo of which death itself still left him most unworthy.

Springing to his feet and pointing toward the youth he had slain, de Sancerre said, calmly, to Noco:

"Tell the chief priest this, that yonder scoundrel insulted the spirit of the sun. For this he died. It was this sword," he went on, picking up his rapier and wiping the blood from the blade with a handful of flowers, "which saved Coyocop from his polluting kiss. I know not who he is, but were he ten thousand times a son of suns he well deserved his death."

Coheyogo stood gazing down at the set face of Manatte as Noco repeated to him the Frenchman's words.

"Stand at the entrance outside the hut," said the chief priest, curtly, to Cabanacte, "and bid no one enter upon pain of death. Of what has happened here, breathe not a word. Go!"

Crawling through the entrance, Cabanacte drew himself erect in the sunlight, a sentry against whose behests none of the chattering sun-worshippers, who had poured into the square to learn the meaning of the cry which had echoed from Coyocop's abode, dared protest.

"Say to the Brother of the Moon that what he did was well done," went on Coheyogo to Noco. "If the draught which he made for the Great Sun gives life as surely as his silver wand brings death, then shall the shadow pass from our weeping race. Go, then, Noco, to the temple quickly, and bid four priests to hasten to me here. Answer no questions, but, as you go, inform the people that Coyocop has destroyed with flowers, brought to her cabin by the faithful, the evil spirit which strove to kill our king and bring destruction upon the City of the Sun. Say to them further, if they should whisper the name of yonder chief, that Manatte has gone to the foot-hills to offer prayers for the Great Sun's life. Go at once, for the day grows old and we have much to do."

Turning toward de Sancerre, who had been whispering to Doña Julia words of hope and cheer, Coheyogo pointed to the feet of the dead sun-prince, and then strode to the head of the corpse. The Frenchman and the chief priest raised the heavy body and placed it upon Doña Julia's reed-plaited bed. With armfuls of magnolia blossoms Coheyogo covered Manatte's face and shoulders, while de Sancerre, comprehending vaguely the scheme which the chief priest had in mind, strewed flowers upon the trunk of his sword's gigantic prey.

"May God defend us!" he muttered. "I fear the keenness of this crafty priest! He has an agile mind. He turns a nightmare to a dream of spring with most exquisite skill. And, for some reason which I cannot find, he takes great pleasure in this gay youth's death. I trust that Doña Julia has learned to read his mind. I dread him either as an ally or a foe!"

Before de Sancerre could find an opportunity for holding further converse with the Spanish maiden, whose presence in the City of the Sun had wellnigh restored his boyhood's faith in miracles, Noco, followed by four silent elders from the temple of the sacred fire, had entered the hut. A few moments later the voiceless, expectant throng in the great square gazed with awe and wonder upon a picturesque procession which moved with slow and solemn tread from Coyocop's abode to the outskirts of the town, beyond which point a word from the temple priests prevented the dusky crowd from following it.

At the head of the cortège walked the chief priest, accompanied by de Sancerre, whose drawn rapier gleamed like a sword of fire as the red rays of the setting sun made a plaything of the blade. Behind them came four white-robed bearers carrying a plaited bier, upon which lay the body of a tall man concealed from view by a trem-

bling shroud of fragrant flowers. Following this strange funeral, upon which the sun-worshippers gazed with awe-stricken eyes, as if they looked upon a marvel wrought by spirits, hobbled the aged Noco, mumbling to herself as she grinned at a people for whose blind superstition she had no respect. Cabanacte had remained as sentry at Coyocop's abode, to chafe under the useless task consigned to him; for to him it seemed more fitting that he should guard Katonah than stand as sentinel before a cabin upon which high heaven smiled.

When the cortège had reached the twilight shadows outside the city, the chief priest gave a few simple directions to the bearers of the corpse and, accompanied by de Sancerre and Noco, turned back toward the temple of the sun.

"Come with me, señora!" cried the Frenchman, when they had reached the square, pointing toward the Great Sun's cabin. "Say to the chief priest, Doña Noco, that you and I must watch by the good King's side to-night."

"It is well," answered Coheyogo, as he listened to the old crone's words. "May the great spirit grant you the skill to save his life. 'Tis best for you that he should live."

With this significant hint, the chief priest strode through the dusk toward the temple of the sacred fire.

Before de Sancerre and Noco had reached the cabin in which the Brother of the Sun lay tossing upon a feverish couch, the Frenchman, whose mind was filled with the vision of a pale, dark-eyed woman, garbed in black, with spring flowers upon her breast, recalled, for an instant, another face which seemed to accuse him in the twilight there of strange forgetfulness.

"Wait, señora," exclaimed de Sancerre, seizing Noco by the arm at the very entrance to the royal hut. "Katonah! It is not well to leave her all alone. Go to your home and bring her here at once. This town's a seething cesspool of dark-brown, white-robed treachery! *Peste!* If harm should come to her, I dare not look into the saintly Membré's good gray eyes again. Come back at once. The Great Sun needs your care."

With these words de Sancerre bent down to enter the royal cabin, while Noco hurried away to rescue Katonah from a lonely night.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE WIELDS HIS SWORD AGAIN

The royal cabin was the largest and most pretentious dwelling-house in the City of the Sun. Its walls were made of mud, sand and moss, and, hardened by time, had become both serviceable and sightly. The roof was formed of grass and reeds, united in a close embrace which defied the most penetrating rain or hail. Forty feet square, the main room of the palace—to give it a grandiloquent name—was furnished in a style befitting the exalted rank of its royal occupant. The Great Sun's throne was simple in construction, being nothing more than a wooden stool four feet in height, but its inherent significance was indicated by the devices with which it had been decorated by reverential and cunning hands. Beneath the throne was stretched the rarest of the King's household furnishings, a carpet made of costly furs, which, so tradition asserted, had aroused the cupidity of a Spaniard in a former generation, and still bore the stain of the life-blood which he had vainly paid in his effort to

rob the feet of royalty of their most valued luxury.

Audience-chamber, throne-room and sleeping-apartment, the main hall of the Great Sun's abode, as de Sancerre entered it, after despatching old Noco to her cabin in search of Katonah, was a sight which might have delighted the eye of an impressionable painter, but would have aroused the temper of a conscientious housekeeper. The Great Sun's sudden illness had begotten a confusion in the royal ménage which had transformed his abode from a picturesque cabin into a disordered hospital.

The stricken chieftain lay tossing from side to side upon a couch covered with painted and embroidered deerskins. As de Sancerre approached his patient, a group of noisy women, the wives of the Great Sun, fled toward the shadows at the further end of the room. Following them, a white-robed, soft-footed sun-worshipper, casting a glance of malice at the Frenchman, deserted the sick King's side and stole away into the darkness. The court physician, who, through the chief priest's influence, had been succeeded by de Sancerre, had been availing himself of an opportunity to observe the effects of the Frenchman's treatment upon the fever-racked scion of the sun.

Jealous of his prerogatives, but knowing that a cruel death awaited him should the Great Sun

die, the royal physician had been torn by conflicting emotions as he gazed down upon the restless form of a chieftain whose bodily welfare had been his care for many years. While he longed, for the sake of his own safety, to see the King restored to health, he harbored a professional protest against the introduction to the royal cabin of this alien moon-magic, which, after all, seemed to consist in nothing more than the administration to the patient of a few drops of a liquid medicine at more or less regular intervals.

De Sancerre was not, in fact, jeopardizing his life—more than ever of value to him since he had solved the mystery of Coyocop—by risking the recovery of the Great Sun upon an answer to prayer, nor upon the chance that the royal sun-worshipper's strong constitution might resist the attack of a sudden indisposition. The Frenchman, upon his first visit to the chieftain's cabin, had quickly reached the conclusion that the Great Sun had fallen a victim to over-excitement and over-eating. De Sancerre's experience in courts and camps had long ago familiarized him with the effects which follow a nervous strain accompanied by excessive indulgence in food and drink.

The Frenchman's observant eye, trained in many climes to harvest large crops of details, had noted, as he approached the City of the Sun

through a semi-tropical forest, a tree whose resinous inner bark vouchsafes to men a balsam of great curative powers. It was from this tree —the copal—that, obeying de Sancerre's directions, old Noco had obtained the ingredients for a fever-quieting draught which had already begun to exercise a beneficent influence upon the Frenchman's royal patient.

As he now gazed down questioningly at the Great Sun, whose kingly bearing had been replaced by that lack of dignity which an acute fever begets even where royalty itself is concerned, de Sancerre was rejoiced to discover that his simple febrifuge had already produced the effect which he had foreseen.

"Thanks be to St. Maturin!" he muttered, contentedly, glancing toward the end of the room to which the King's wives and the discomfited court physician had withdrawn. "My surmise was correct. The Great Sun was too hospitable to the wandering moon. I have known more enlightened monarchs, in more highly civilized lands, to succumb to their excessive zeal for good-fellowship. Quiet, care, and a few drops of balsam are all that this old chief requires to make him a king again from top to toe. *Nom de Dieu*, another day like this one, and I'll need medicine myself! The rôle of executioner is not so bad, but a physician—*peste!* May the devil

fly away with that chief priest! I fear me he's a snake. I should dare to hope that I might rescue Doña Julia from this bloodthirsty land if I could but trust that crafty Coheyogo, who's as keen as Richelieu and as slippery as Mazarin! I must keep a sharp eye upon his reverence, or he will yet cast his sacred cords around my neck!"

To de Sancerre, thus standing in silent revery beside the Great Sun's couch, came Noco, hobbling from the entrance with hurried step. Her appearance was greeted by a more insistent chorus from the gossiping women at the end of the room, to whom the outcome of their royal husband's illness meant either life or death.

"Katonah!" panted the old crone, as she reached the Frenchman's side. "She has disappeared."

"Impossible!" exclaimed de Sancerre. "You know her not, señora. She would not leave your cabin without a word to me."

"I am not blind!" cried Noco, angrily. "My house is empty and the girl is gone. And Cabanacte—"

"What of him?" asked de Sancerre, impatiently, as Noco paused for breath.

"I told him of Katonah's flight, and he has set out in search of her."

"The traitor!" muttered the Frenchman, peering down at the old hag who had brought to him

such unwelcome news. "Your grandson, Doña Noco, has abandoned the spirit for the flesh—and left Coyocop without a guard! Surely, Katonah is safer in the forest than is the spirit of the sun in a city which pretends to worship her. I shall chide your grandson, Doña Noco, if I ever look upon his giant form again. But stay you here, señora. When this great Son of Suns awakens from his sleep give him a drink of balsam—and he'll sleep again. I go to Coyocop, and will return anon."

The moon had not yet arisen, and darkness and silence combined to cast a menacing spell upon the impressionable City of the Sun. De Sancerre's spirits were at a low ebb as he groped his way toward Doña Julia's unguarded cabin. The reaction from a day of excitement had come upon him, and the gloom of the deserted square did not tend toward the restoration of his former cheerfulness. It was true that he had escaped death through a combination of circumstances which apparently had won for him the good-will of the chief priest, but the outlook for the immediate future was not promising. De la Salle could not return from the South for several weeks, even if he and his followers escaped the perils which might menace them as they approached the mouth of the great river. Cabanacte, to whom de Sancerre had looked for the

aid which might make his escape with the Spanish girl possible, had betrayed friendship at the instigation of a stronger passion. His return from the forest might be long delayed. As he approached the hut in which his grateful eyes had rested upon the pale, sweet face of Julia de Aquilar, de Sancerre felt a sinking of the heart, a sensation of utter hopelessness which was an unacceptable novelty to the vivacious Frenchman, against whose sanguine temperament the shafts of despair had heretofore been powerless.

As he stationed himself, with rapier in hand, before the entrance to Coyocop's sacred cabin, there was nothing in his surroundings to relight the flame of hope in de Sancerre's soul. Clouds had begun to darken the eastern sky, revoking its promise of a moonlit night. A moaning wind, damp and chill, had stolen from its lair in the forest to annoy a fickle city with its cold, moist kiss. The world seemed to be made of sighs and shadows. The great square in front of him, dark and deserted, strove to deceive the Frenchman with its tale of an abandoned town. Now and then the voice of some devout sun-worshipper, raised in hoarse prayer, would penetrate the walls of a hut and bear witness to the city's swarming life.

After a time there came upon de Sancerre the impression that piercing black eyes watched him

as he strode up and down in front of the silent, shadow-haunted hut in which the strange chances of life had imprisoned the only woman who had ever aroused in his mocking soul the precious passion of romantic love. He cut the darkness with his eager glance, but suspicion was not replaced by certainty. Nevertheless, the feeling grew strong within him that the night wind toyed with white robes not far away, and that stealthy footsteps reached his ears on either hand.

By a strong effort of will, de Sancerre routed the sensation of mingled consternation and impotence which the chill gloom and the presence of prying spies had begotten, and, drawing close to the doorway of Doña Julia's cabin, hummed an ancient love-ballad born of the troubadours. The song had died in the damp embrace of the roving wind when the silence was broken by a voice which reached de Sancerre's grateful ears from the entrance to the hut.

"Speak not in Spanish and in whispers only, Mademoiselle de Aquilar!" exclaimed the Frenchman in a low voice, not changing his attitude of a swordsman doing duty as a sentinel. "There are listening ears upon all sides of me. If we converse in French, they'll think we use the tongue of sun or moon."

"I heard your voice, monsieur. Is there great danger if we talk a while?"

"I hardly know," answered de Sancerre, striving again to read the secrets of the night. "But listen, for when the chance may come to me to speak to you again I do not know. Be ready at any moment, at a word from me, to leave this hut. I'll use old Noco for my messenger, when I have made my plans. I dare not flee with you to-night, for, as I speak, I see the ghostly menace of a skulking temple priest. There'd be no safety for us beyond the town. Alas, we must abide our time!"

"But, oh, my heart is light, monsieur," whispered the girl, from whose Spanish tongue the French words made rich music as they fell. "If this be not a dream, it cannot be that you have come in vain. One night I heard my father's voice in Paradise. He spoke to me of you, and when old Noco told me that by the river there were white-faced men, I heard his voice again—and wrote my name upon the bark. It is a miracle, monsieur!"

"A miracle, indeed!" exclaimed de Sancerre, chafing under the tyranny of his grim surroundings and distrustful of an overpowering inclination to bend down and clasp the girl's hand in his. "But the devil and the sun-priests, mademoiselle, are in league against us. Pray to the saints that we may foil them both! *Ma foi*, a half-done miracle is worse than none! But this

I promise you, that whether you and I be playthings of a heartless Fate, or the favored wards of Mother Mary and her Son, I'll plot and scheme and fight until I save you from captivity, or pay the price of death. And so, good-night! I dare not let you linger longer where you are, for already these white-robed spies are growing restless at our talk, and I hear them muttering in the darkness there, as if in resentment of my converse with their deity."

A suppressed sob told de Sancerre how much his presence meant to the lonely girl.

"Can we not leave this awful place at once?" she moaned. "Forgive me, monsieur, but it has been so long since I have seen a ray of hope in this black hole that every moment since I knew that you were here has seemed a year. May Mother Mary guard you through the night! 'Tis well I love my prayers, monsieur! I will not sleep."

"Nay, mademoiselle, 'tis well to pray, but not to lose your sleep. You'll need the saints, anon—but also strength. Sleep, Doña Julia, for the love of—God! And so, good-night! I'll watch beside your door until these slinking scoundrels have gone to feed their sacred fire."

No sound save the complaining of the restless wind broke the stillness of the night, which had grown blacker as its age increased. Suddenly

de Sancerre, as agile as a cat, sprang forward, barely in time to escape the clutch of remorseless arms. Turning, like a thunderbolt he drove his sword through a white-robed night-prowler, who died at his feet without a groan. So sudden and noiseless had been the attack and its fatal defence that it had not recalled Doña Julia to the entrance to the hut. On the instant, old Noco grasped de Sancerre by the arm, and, turning in anger, the Frenchman found himself confronted by Coheyogo.

"I've killed another snake, señora!" exclaimed de Sancerre, grimly, pointing to a white mass at his feet. "Will you say to the chief priest, Doña Noco, that I should more highly prize his friendship if he kept his temple priests from off my back?"

Coheyogo muttered a few words to the aged interpreter.

"The man you've slain has been rebellious and deserves his fate. He disobeyed a strict command," said Noco, repeating the chief priest's curt comment. "He'll place a guard of trusty priests before the door of Coyocop, that you and I may seek the Great Sun's side."

"How kind he is!" muttered de Sancerre, petulantly. "A pretty plight this is for a Count of Languedoc! I'm tired of this Coheyogo's domineering ways! But still, I dare not cross

him now. Come, señora," he exclaimed in Spanish, turning toward the King's cabin and groping his way through the black night. "I trust my sword will find no more to do to-night! It has had a busy day!"

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH THE CITY OF THE SUN ENJOYS A FÊTE

The moon of strawberries had been succeeded by the moon of old corn, and there was joy in the land of the sun-worshippers. In other words, the month of April had gone by and the month of May had found the Great Sun's grateful subjects making ready to celebrate his restoration to health by national games and a thanksgiving feast.

The laggard weeks had told many a flattering tale of hope to Count Louis de Sancerre, but at the end of a month's sojourn in the City of the Sun he still found himself, in all essential particulars, a helpless stranger in a fickle and jealous land, honored by the Great Sun and the chief priest, and admired by the people, but closely watched by sharp black eyes, from which flashed gleams of malice and suspicion. Impatient and impetuous though he was, the Frenchman dared not force the issue to a crisis. Easy of accomplishment as the kidnapping of Coyocop seemed

to be, de Sancerre realized that he would rush to certain death if he took a false step and attempted a rescue hampered by his ignorance of the surrounding country and of the movements of Sieur de la Salle. Day succeeded day and no word came from the river to the pale and haggard Frenchman, whose only joy in life during those dreary weeks sprang from the voice of Julia de Aquilar, which reached his grateful ears now and then as he prowled around her cabin late at night. Even this source of delight he was obliged to forego after a time, receiving from the chief priest a broad hint regarding the dangers which menaced a stranger in the town after dark, and learning from Noco that Coheyogo had discovered in the temple the existence of a fanatical faction among the sun-priests which had sworn to overcome de Sancerre's moon-magic by physical force.

But it was Cabanacte's failure to return from his quest of Katonah that had wound the strongest cord around the Frenchman's hands. Could he have had the giant's assistance at this crisis, de Sancerre felt confident that any one of a number of schemes which he had been obliged to reject for lack of an ally could have been forced to the goal of success. But Cabanacte had disappeared, had made no further sign, and old Noco, to whom her grandson was as an open

book, had said sadly to de Sancerre that the youth would not return.

The restless and wellnigh discouraged Frenchman had, through his success as a physician, won the enthusiastic gratitude of the Great Sun, who had insisted upon making his Brother of the Moon the honored guest of the royal cabin, within which de Sancerre was compelled, much against his will, to spend the major portion of the time, talking to the convalescent king by the aid of Noco's nimble tongue.

It was the dawn of a cloudless day near the middle of the moon of old corn when de Sancerre, opening his eyes after a night of dreamless, restful sleep, enjoyed, for a moment, that sensation of physical well-being which suggests the possibility that nature harbors no enmity to man. Outside the royal cabin the morning vibrated with the melody of birds and the distant rumors of a forest springing gladly into life. There was movement and bustle inside the hut, and de Sancerre turned lazily upon his gayly-bedecked couch to watch the Great Sun as he paid homage to his risen god. With a spotless white robe flowing from his royal shoulders, the King, still feeble from his recent illness, stood in the centre of the room gravely lighting his calumet from a live ember which one of his wives held out to him. Then striding toward the dawn-beset exit

to the cabin, which led straight to the rising sun, the convalescent chief blew three puffs of tobacco-smoke toward the deified orb of day.

"*Pardieu*," muttered de Sancerre, "if they would but sacrifice more tobacco and less blood to their shining god, this city would not be so repulsive to a man of tender heart." The Frenchman had thrown his slim legs over the side of the plaited bed and sat gazing at the Sun-Chief with a quizzical smile upon his clean-cut, thin and colorless face. Suddenly upon the air of morning arose the shouts of a joyful multitude approaching the Great Sun's cabin. As if born of the dawn, the noisy throng poured into the square, carrying to the palace of their king offerings of fruit, flowers, vegetables, meats and fish. Into the cabin crowded the smiling, chattering sun-worshippers, their white teeth gleaming and their black eyes flashing fire as they piled their gifts around the Great Sun's hand-painted throne, interfering with de Sancerre's toilet but treating him with the respect due to a son of the full moon, in whose magic they had reason to rejoice. A noisy, picturesque, light-hearted crowd, delighting in the escape of their king from death, and in the postponement of the general slaughter of men, women, and children which would have followed his demise, they impressed the Frenchman as overgrown, frolicsome, unreliable children,

beneath whose gayety lurked the capacity for bloody mischief.

Half-dressed and somewhat weary of the glad uproar, de Sancerre, having withdrawn to a distant corner of the hut, stood watching a ceremony which was destined to replenish the royal larder, when he felt a tug at his arm, and, looking down, met the keen eyes of Noco.

"'Tis from Coyocop," she muttered, slipping into his hand a piece of mulberry bark. The corner in which he stood was not well-lighted, but de Sancerre was able, at length, to decipher the scrawl made by Julia de Aquilar. Her words were few:

"Eat no fish at to-day's banquet," ran the message. De Sancerre glanced down at the old hag questioningly, but there was nothing in her face to suggest that she understood the warning which had been scratched upon the bark. The moment seemed to be ripe for putting into operation a plan upon which de Sancerre's mind had been at work for several days.

"Tell me, señora," he said, observing with satisfaction that no prying eyes were fixed upon them at that moment, "would it please you to find your grandson, Cabanacte, and lure him from the forest to his home?"

There was a gleam in her small, black eyes as they met his which assured de Sancerre that he

had pressed a finger upon the beldame's dearest wish.

"It cannot be done," she croaked, turning her back to him as if about to mingle with the laughing throng. De Sancerre seized her by the arm.

"Listen, Noco," he urged, bending down to whisper eager Spanish into her old ears. "Coyocop and I, going to the forest side by side, could find Cabanacte and the maiden from the north. Tell this to Coyocop, that I will come to her when the banquet nears its end at dark. I leave the rest to you, for you must lead us from the city to the woods. The moon of old corn will give us light to-night to find your grandson in the forest glades or where the river floweth toward the sea. Will you take my word to her?"

"*Si, señor*," muttered Noco, gazing up at de Sancerre with eyes which strove to read his very soul. "But if we fail—if Coyocop is missed—it will be death for you and me."

"We cannot fail, señora, for the full moon is my god! We'll find your Cabanacte ere the night is old — and none will ever know. And now, begone! Between the setting of the sun and the rising of the moon I'll come to you and Coyocop. Be true to me, señora, and by the magic of my silver wand you'll look upon your grandson's face to-night."

In another moment Noco, eluding the Great

Sun's glance as she stole between the tall sun-worshippers, had crept from the cabin into the rosy light of day.

The hours which followed her departure passed like long days to de Sancerre. He watched the Great Sun's wives as they became surfeited with the petty tyranny which they exercised at the expense of a throng of lesser women, upon whom rested the drudgery necessitated by the approaching feast. Cares of state—an inventory of the tribute paid to his divine right—occupied the attention of the King until noon had long been passed and left de Sancerre to his own devices. Seated at the entrance to the cabin, the Frenchman could observe what was passing in the sunny square outside, while he still kept an eye upon the Great Sun and his busy household. Half-naked boys and girls, gay with garlands of flowers, were arranging long lines of wooden benches in front of the royal dwelling under the direction of a master of ceremonies who had escaped death with his king.

The bench upon which the Great Sun, the chief priest, and de Sancerre, the nation's guest, were to sit stood just in front of the King's cabin, and had been covered with painted skins and surrounded by a carpet of magnolia blossoms.

As the hour for the banquet approached the nobly-born sun-worshippers gathered in groups

at the further end of the square, awaiting a signal from royalty to seat themselves upon the benches, hot by this time from the glare of a cloudless day. Gayety, suppressed but impatient, reigned in the City of the Sun. Black eyes flashed above smiling lips, and now and then a chorus of happy voices would raise a chant in praise of a deity who had blessed the earth with fecund warmth. Even the stealthy, silent, keen-eyed temple priests failed to cast a damper upon the joyous children of the sun as they mingled with the throng or lurked in the shadow of their skull-crowned palisade.

The banquet had been under way for more than an hour before de Sancerre, seated between the Great Sun and Coheyogo, had been able to revive the hope which had sprung up in his breast earlier in the day. His environment, as it met his eyes at the outset of the feast, seemed to preclude all possibility of a successful issue to the plan which he had impulsively put into operation. A group of plebeians, watching the nobility as it made merry—apparently at the King's expense, but, in reality, at theirs—stood directly in front of Coyocop's abode and were laughingly driving de Sancerre's heart into his pointed shoes. Would the gaping throng disperse as the sun sank low in the sky, and leave to the Frenchman one chance in a thousand for the triumph of his dar-

ing scheme? The hours, as they passed, left de Sancerre less and less self-confident, while they increased the joyous hilarity of the feasters among whom he sat. The mud-made walls of the houses on either side of him had begun to throw long shadows across the square before de Sancerre was able to cull from his surroundings a bud of hope. It sprang from the tongue of Noco, who, as she passed behind his back, muttered in Spanish:

"I will touch your arm at dark. Then follow me."

At that moment the women serving the royal table placed before the Great Sun and his guests of honor bits of bark upon which rested fish still hissing from the heat of a wood-fire. De Sancerre, who had turned to nod to Noco, caught a gleam of excitement in the black eyes of the serving-woman who had stretched her scrawny, brown arms between him and the chief priest. As he faced the feast again the fish in front of him recalled the written warning which he had received that morning from Julia de Aquilar.

"Touch no fish at to-day's banquet," repeated de Sancerre to himself. "'Twas good advice, I think. I'll let this schemer, Coheyogo, eat my dish." Acting upon the impulse of the moment, the Frenchman touched the chief priest upon the arm, and, as Coheyogo's black eyes met his, he

made a gesture toward the retreating form of Noco, as if he invoked the aid of the temple to recall the interpreter to his side. The spontaneity of de Sancerre's action had its effect upon the sun-priest, for he turned instantly and called aloud to the double-tongued and two-faced hag. With a rapidity and deftness worthy of a prestidigitateur, de Sancerre transposed the fragments of fish-laden bark upon the bench, and, as Coheyogo resumed his former attitude, he was confronted, unknowingly, with a dish with which a fanatical but disobedient priest, hating moon-magic, had tampered.

There is but short shrift given to the day when the sun deserts it in southern climes. Twilight had already begun to cast a gloom upon the feast, against which the forced gayety begotten of cinnamon-flavored wine could not prevail, when de Sancerre again felt old Noco's touch upon his arm. Before he turned to her the Frenchman, whose heart was beating wildly beneath his rusty velvets, cast a glance at the Great Sun. To his great satisfaction he discovered that his royal patient had wholly disregarded the warning vouchsafed by his recent illness and had been indulging in the pleasures of the table to an extent that had placed again in jeopardy the lives of those of his subjects who were doomed to accompany him in state to the spirit-

land. But it was the condition of Coheyogo at that moment which gave to de Sancerre the greater cause for joy. The chief priest sat blinking down at a half-eaten fish, as if he struggled vainly to read the grim secret which it held. Now and then his head would drop forward as if he had been overcome by sleep. Then, by an effort of will, he would straighten his spine and attempt to collect his thoughts. The Frenchman watched him searchingly for a moment, and observed with delight that the struggle which the chief priest was making against a slothful but resistless foe would end in full defeat.

"*Ma foi*," muttered de Sancerre, as he crawled softly from between the intoxicated State and the bedrugged Church into the shadow into which Noco had stolen, "had I not learned a trick or two in camps, 'tis I who would be nodding, not Coheyogo. I would I could remain to see the outcome of this contest between a poison and a snake!"

Noco had grasped him by the arm, and in another instant de Sancerre found himself stealing toward Doña Julia's cabin through the darkest corner of the crowded square. Either the saints or the moon-god, or senseless chance, granted the Frenchman favors at that crucial hour; for, as he approached Coyocop's sacred

abode, wellnigh hidden from sight beneath hillocks of cut flowers, a group of enthusiasts at the feast, still unconquered by the fermented juice of the cassia-berry, had mounted the food-stained benches and raised a maudlin, monotonous chant, in which the onlooking plebeians accompanied them. At the same moment a crowd of boys and girls at the further end of the square had begun a weird, ungraceful, unseemly dance, in which, as time passed, men and women joined with shouts of wild laughter. Presently the kettle-drum added its barbaric clamor to the din which fretted the darkness as it crept across the disordered square. Even the sun-priests, heated by the epidemic of gayety which had seized the town, had left their sacred fire to the care of a chosen few, and were now mingling with the shouting, dancing, delirious multitude upon a pretext of good-fellowship, which was not too well received.

"Wait here, señor," whispered Noco, in a guttural voice which shook with excitement, pushing de Sancerre against the wall at the rear of Doña Julia's hut. "Don't stir until I return. I fear some priest may still be watching me."

The old crone disappeared around the corner of the cabin, and de Sancerre stood, trying to swallow his insistent heart, as he listened to the uproar in the square and, presently, to the voice

of Julia de Aquilar whispering to Noco almost at his very side.

"Come," hissed Noco, at his shoulder, seizing him by the wrist, and dragging Doña Julia toward the black shelter of the forest by the other hand. "No word! No rest! There will be no safety for us until we reach the trees."

Followed through the gloom by the harsh discord of a mad town's revelry, Doña Julia de Aquilar, of Seville, and Count Louis de Sancerre, of Languedoc, linked together by a wrinkled beldame, who looked at that moment like a grinning witch escaping to the wilds with the helpless victims of her spite, hurried, with hearts growing lighter with every step, toward a pathless wilderness, in which a thousand lurking perils would menace them at every turn.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE UNDERGOES MANY VARIED EMOTIONS

The full moon of May, the moon of old corn, shone down upon a virgin forest bounding with the high pulse of a ripe spring-time. Its white splendor tiptoed along the outskirts of impenetrable thickets, or danced gayly down majestic glades, patrolled by oak and hickory, sassafras, and poplar trees. Presently, shunning a menacing morass, the silvery outriders of the moon's array would file along a narrow bayou or charge *en masse* across the broad surface of a trembling lake. And while the triumphant moonlight took possession of a splendid province, the thousand voices of the forest murmured at midnight a welcome to the conqueror.

Panting for breath, and worn with the friction of their race for freedom through swamps and woods, de Sancerre and his companions, after long hours of hurried flight, paused to recover their strength, far to the southward of the City of the Sun. The marvellous endurance

of Julia de Aquilar, whose urgency had granted to the enraged Noco no chance to protest against the fervor of their mad career, had put even the wiry, hardened frame of the lithe Frenchman to a stubborn test. Hand in hand de Sancerre and the Spanish girl had sped onward, followed by the grumbling crone, now breaking their way through vindictive underbrush, anon wetting their feet in marshy vales, again making progress beneath stately trees, avoiding the deep gloom of threatening recesses and following a moon-track, like hounds upon a scent. Behind them sat certain death; beyond them, a joyful promise lured them deeper and ever deeper into the primeval wilds.

Tottering and breathless, old Noco reached the crest of the tree-crowned hillock upon which Doña Julia and de Sancerre, gasping, speechless, but strong with renewed hope, stood awaiting her coming. Throwing her old bones upon the damp grass, Noco lay moaning for a time in senile misery. Youth, under the spurs of fear and hope, had led old age a cruel race. Noco had come into the forest to solve by moon-magic the secret of her grandson's flight, and, lo! the wizard upon whom she relied had become a will-o'-the-wisp, in tattered velvets, using his diabolical power to kidnap Coyocop, the spirit of the sun.

"Lean against the tree-trunk, señora," said de

Sancerre to Doña Julia, his voice tripping over his breath as he spoke. "I fear old Noco has found our pace too hot. But, even now, I dare not rest. We must go on!"

Descending the hillock to the treacherous ooze which mirrored the moon in a multitude of pools, the Frenchman filled his bedraggled bonnet with cold water and returned quickly to Noco's side. Bending down, he forced the panting beldame to drink deep of the refreshing draught. Then he poured a cold stream upon her drawn, dusky face and through the white hair above her wrinkled brow. The old hag's beady eyes had watched his every movement. Had he not cast a spell upon the moon-kissed water with which he laved her head? Surely this revival of her strength, which raised her on the instant to her feet, was magical. Cruel though he might have been to her, the Brother of the Moon was making full reparation with his witchery for the suffering which she had undergone. Old Noco was more superstitious at midnight than at dawn, more a savage in the forest than in her city hut. The mocking gleam which her eyes had known so well the moonlight could not find, as she stood facing de Sancerre, gazing up at him with a question in her glance.

"Cabanacte?" she exclaimed, still short of breath.

"We will seek him by the river," answered de Sancerre, pointing to a break in the forest which opened toward the east, as he drew the woman toward the hollow gum-tree against which the Spanish girl was seated, silently pouring out her soul in gratitude to Mother Mary and the saints.

"But there is no time," complained the old woman. "They will miss Coyocop, and if they find us in the woods — ugh!" The grunt of horror to which Noco gave vent bore witness to how much cruelty her aged eyes had gazed upon.

"Listen, Doña Noco," said de Sancerre sternly, as he extended his hand to Julia de Aquilar and, indulging in a courtly flourish wholly out of keeping with his environment, drew her to her feet, "we have set out to find Katonah and your grandson. Be true to Cabanacte and put your trust in Coyocop. Listen, señora," and here de Sancerre bent down and addressed the old crone with impressive emphasis, "as we hurry on, ponder the words I speak; the City of the Sun is unworthy of the spirit sent from God. It is accursed. Its temple runs with blood, and its vile priests have sealed the city's doom. Come; 'twas your grandson who found Coyocop. 'Tis Coyocop who shall now find Cabanacte."

Onward through the moonlit forest the trio kept their course, tending always toward a noble

river that might bear them, could they build a raft, to the vagrant camp of de la Salle, pitched somewhere further south. Wasting no breath in futile words, de Sancerre maintained a telling pace which carried them every moment further from a city of murder toward a stream where hunger menaced them.

For two long, heavy hours they struggled eastward across the treacherous margin of a river grown erratic from its weary longing for the sea. Now and then de Sancerre would turn to refresh his straining eyes with a vision of beauty, done in black and white against the moonlight, and, for all time, upon his heart. A word of encouragement would escape from his dry lips at intervals, and a smile of hope and gratitude would reward him for his prodigality of breath.

The want and hardship which confronted them, the chances of capture from savage tribes, of death from starvation, or swamp-begotten fever, although clear to de Sancerre's mind, could not, in that glad hour, cast a shadow upon his buoyant spirits. "A half-done miracle is worse than none," he had said to Doña Julia. It gave him renewed confidence in the future to feel that upon his own courage, pertinacity, and foresight would depend the happy outcome of a strange adventure which chance, at the outset, had made possible. It was pleasant to de Sancerre to

reflect that he could now relieve the saints of all responsibility for the issue of events.

Nevertheless, the Frenchman uttered a word of gratitude to St. Maturin, who watches over fools, when, about two hours after midnight, he and his companions shook the forest from their weary shoulders and stood upon the curving shore of the River Colbert—known to later times as the Mississippi. De Sancerre's quick eye saw at once that at this point Sieur de la Salle had, weeks before, made his camp for a night. By a short cut through the woods, the Frenchman had reached a point upon the river to gain which the canoes of the great explorer had labored for a day upon the winding stream. That the litter left upon the bank had not been abandoned by a party of roving Indians was proven beyond peradventure to de Sancerre by a discovery which electrified his pulse and renewed his admiration for the saint whom he had just invoked. As he hurried down the slope which fell gently from the forest to the stream, anxious to enter the deserted huts, made of reeds and leafy branches by expert hands to serve as shelter for a single night, de Sancerre's torn shoes struck against an object which forced an exclamation of astonishment and delight from his ready tongue.

Gleaming in the moonlight at his feet, the long barrel of a flintlock musket pointed straight

at a powder-horn and a bag of bullets, as if the weapon, lacking nourishment, prayed to be recharged. Bending down, de Sancerre raised the clumsy gun and examined its mechanism with the eagerness of a shipwrecked mariner toward whose raft the sea had tossed a chest which might, when opened, gladden his eyes with food.

Doña Julia and Noco stood behind the Frenchman watching his movements with eyes in which curiosity had conquered the heaviness of dire fatigue.

"This, Mademoiselle de Aquilar," explained de Sancerre, balancing the heavy musket in his hand, "is the *fusil ordinaire*, or snaphance gun. I have heard young hotspurs in the low countries —who knew little of the rapier's niceties—assert that, at close quarters, its butt-end is more deadly than a sword. Of its merits in a *mêlée* I am not ripe to speak, but I learned, while yet I lingered with Count Frontenac, to drive a bullet through a distant tree. The weapon has its use! You may thank the saints, mademoiselle, for this gun and powder-horn. 'Twill serve my turn if my captain's careless redmen have left no eatables in yonder huts."

"Ah, well I knew, monsieur, you had not come to me in vain!" exclaimed Doña Julia, a glad smile gleaming in her eloquent eyes, beneath which rested the dark shadows of physical ex-

haustion. "The saints have led your steps to where the musket lay!"

"*Mais, oui!* But tell not Noco this. Her ears must harken to another tale."

Turning to gaze down at the silent beldame, the fiery brightness of whose busy eyes the strain of a forced march at midnight had not dimmed, 'though her face twitched with fatigue and her scrawny hands shook in the moonlight, de Sancerre said:

"The Brother of the Moon is glad, señora, for my god has put into my hands the thunder and the lightning—to call Cabanacte from the wilds and to smite the sun-priests if they follow us. To-morrow I will make the echoes of the forest lead your grandson to us here. But now we must have rest, for Coyocop is weary, and the dawn must find us up."

St. Maturin, the friend of fools, still played de Sancerre's game. As the Frenchman, followed by the women, to whom each step they took was now a hardship, entered the nearest hut, he saw at once that his withdrawal from de la Salle's expedition, and the loss of Chatémuc and Katonah, had led the explorer to lighten his equipment by the contents of one canoe, intending, doubtless, to retake the stores upon his return should circumstances make them again of value to him. A boat-load of corn-meal and

gunpowder had been stored in the hut in the hope that neither the weather nor roving savages would deprive the returning explorers of its use.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" cried the Frenchman, gayly, as he pointed to the godsend which made his light heart lighter. "There lie food and ammunition. 'Tis true, indeed, that Heaven has been kind to us! And so I leave you, Mademoiselle de Aquilar, to your prayers and sleep. I must make further search."

Old Noco, who had paid out the last link of her energy, had made a shake-down of the meal-bags, and her labored breathing proved that her aged bones were finding the rest they craved. De Sancerre held Doña Julia's cold, trembling hand in his and gazed upon her weary face for a long moment, whose very silence was eloquent with words he could not speak.

"Good-night, monsieur," faltered the girl, tears born of gratitude and physical weariness dimming the dark beauty of her eyes.

"Good-night," he said, bending to touch her white hand with his lips. Then he drew himself erect, trembling as if the damp breeze from the river had chilled his overwrought frame. Suddenly he clasped the weeping girl to his breast, and his lips met hers in a kiss which crowned the miracle the saints had wrought for them.

"My love! My love!" whispered de Sancerre;

and when he reached the moonlit night outside the hut again it seemed to him that the river and the forest had changed their outlines to his eyes and that he stood within the confines of a paradise. He seated himself upon the sloping margin of the stream, vainly attempting to recall his soaring thoughts to the homely exigencies of his grim environment. It was no paradise by which he was surrounded. A lonely flood finding its way to a lonely sea lay before his eyes, while at his back stood a pathless wilderness through which, even at this moment, black-hearted fanatics, skilled in woodcraft, might be following his trail. This dark thought, clouding the splendor of a dream begotten by a kiss, led de Sancerre, almost unconsciously, to take from the ground at his side the awkward musket with which chance had armed him. He longed to test its prowess as an ally, to prove to his troubled mind that dampness and neglect had not robbed the flintlock of its heritage. With no intention of giving way to the curiosity which assailed him, the Frenchman carefully loaded the gun with powder and ball and raised it affectionately to his shoulder. In that hour of peril and loneliness the musket seemed to be a friend speaking to him of de la Salle's loyalty and persistence and of the certainty that his return from the gulf could not be long delayed.

Suddenly an uncanny premonition crept over de Sancerre, whose nervous energy had been exhausted by a day and night of strangely contrasted emotions and by a physical strain whose reaction was now taking its revenge. Turning his back to the river, de Sancerre's restless eyes swept the black, threatening line of the forest, behind which the moon was drooping. Presently his heart seemed to clutch his throat and the long barrel of the musket trembled as his hand shook for an instant. At the edge of the woods, two hundred yards beyond the camp, stood a white, naked thing, resembling in outline a man, but as shadowy and ghostly as a creature made of moonbeams. It stood erect for a moment and then bent down as if it would crawl back into the forest upon all fours.

Impulsively, de Sancerre covered the apparition with his gun and snapped the steel against the flint. A crash, echoing across the startled flood, and hurled back in anger by the bushes and the trees, made sudden war upon the silence of the stately night. When the smoke from the friendly gun—in good case to serve the Frenchman's ends—had cleared away, de Sancerre saw no ghastly victim of his marksmanship lying in white relief against the black outline of the woods. "Mayhap," he reflected, "my bullet passed through a shadow not of earth! Don

Joseph? Perhaps I drew him back from hell with that dear kiss I won! But what mad thoughts are these? 'Twas but a gray wolf in the scrub, or a vision raised by my own weariness. At all events, *ma petite*," he exclaimed, patting the smoking musket contentedly, "there's now no doubt that you and I agree."

A soft touch fell upon de Sancerre's arm, and, turning, he looked into the white, agitated face of Doña Julia.

"Fear not, señora," he exclaimed, earnestly. "Forgive me that I disturbed your rest. But it seemed best to me to try the temper of this clumsy gun. 'Tis always well to know how great may be the prowess of an ally whom you have gained."

Her dark eyes were reading his face closely.

"They have not found us?" she asked, eagerly. "You did not shoot at men?"

"Only at a target made by dreams," he answered, reassuringly. "I shot at the phantom of my hate, *ma chère*, and, lo! it brought my love to me."

Her dark eyes fell until their long black lashes rested against her white face.

"You love me, señor?" she whispered, in a voice which filled his soul with an ecstasy it had never known before.

And once again the waters of the listening river bore a love-tale to the distant gulf—a strange, sweet sequel to gossip which the waves had heard before.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH SPIRITS, GOOD AND BAD, BESET A WILDERNESS

Cabanacte's wooing of Katonah, an idyl of the forest, a love-poem lost in the wilds, a spring song set to halting words, had filled two simple lives with sadness through days of wandering and nights of melancholy dreams. When the stalwart sun-worshipper had first overtaken the girl, fleeing she knew not whither, and inspired by a motive which she could not analyze, Cabanacte had been greeted by a faint, apathetic smile which had aroused in his heart the hope that, as time went by, her eyes might look into his with the light of a great happiness shining in their depths.

As the days and nights came and went and returned again, while a glad world chanted the wedding-song of spring, and the forest whispered the gossip of the mating-time, Cabanacte's gentleness brought peace without passion, affection without encouragement, into Katonah's gaze as it rested upon the dark, strong, kindly face of

the dusky youth. Reclining at her feet for hours at a time, the bronze giant would attempt to tell the story of his love to the Mohican maiden in broken Spanish, only a few words of which Katonah understood. But what mattered the tongue in which he spoke? The moon of old corn was at the full, and the universe grew eloquent with a language which every living creature comprehended. The birds were singing in the trees from a libretto which the squirrels and chipmunks knew by heart. The wild flowers blushed at a romance buzzed by bees, and from the grass and the waters and the forest-glades arose a myriad of voices repeating the ballad of that gayest of all troubadours, the spring-time of the South.

Cabanacte's wooing assumed many varying forms. As a huntsman he would lay the trophies of his skill at Katonah's feet. He would lure a fish from a stream, and, making a fire by rubbing wood against a stone, would serve to her a tempting dish upon a platter made of bark. Wild plums, yellow or red, berries luscious with the essence of the sunshine, and ripe, sweet figs served as seductive foils to the burnt-offerings which he placed upon the altar of his love.

Hand in hand they would wander aimlessly through the flower-scented woods by day, silent for hours at a time and soothed into contentment

by a barbaric indifference to what the future might have in store for them. At night Katonah would sleep beneath a sheltering tree, while Cabanacte watched by her side until his eyes grew dim and his head would wobble from the fillips of fatigue. Presently he would shake slumber from his stooping shoulders and sit erect, to gaze down lovingly upon the quiet face and the slender, graceful figure of the melancholy maiden, whose beauty was more potent to his eyes than the heavy hand of sleep. Why should Cabanacte give way to dreams while his gaze could rest upon a vision of the night more grateful to his longing soul than the fairest picture that his fancy had ever drawn?

Now and again the dusky giant would gently touch the sleeping maiden's brow with trembling fingers, or bend down to press with reverent lips a kiss upon her cool, smooth cheek. Half-awakened by his caress, Katonah would stir restlessly in the arms of mother-earth, and Cabanacte, alarmed and repentant, would draw himself erect again to continue his conflict with the promptings of his love and the call to oblivion with which sleep assailed him.

Often in the heat of noonday his guard would be relieved, and he would slumber beneath the trees while Katonah sat as sentry by his side. Then would the flying and the climbing and the

crawling creatures of the forest come forth to sing and chatter and squeak in the effort to lure the silent, sad-eyed maiden to tell to them the secret of her heart. Of whom was she thinking as she reclined against a tree-trunk and gazed, not at the stalwart, picturesque youth stretched in sleep upon the greensward at her side, but up at the white-flecked, May-day sky, a patch of dotted blue above the flowering trees? Why did the tears creep into her dark, gentle eyes at such a time as this? Was she not young and strong and beautiful? Was not all nature joyous with the bounding pulse of spring? What craveth this brown-cheeked maiden which the kindly earth has not bestowed? Surely, the sleeping stripling at her feet is worthy of her maiden heart! Not often does the spring-time lure into the forest, to meet the searching, knowing eyes of a thousand living creatures, a nobler youth than he who, for days and nights, has been her worshipper and slave. The forest is young to-day with vernal ecstasy, but, oh, how old it is with the worldly wisdom of long centuries! What means this futile wooing of a sunburnt demigod and the cold indifference of a stubborn maiden, who sighs and weeps when all the joys of this glad earth are hers?

The forest holds a mystery, a problem strange and new. The breeze at sunset tells the story

to the blushing waters of the lakes, and spreads the gossip through the swamps and glades. The moonbeams steal abroad and verify the tale that the twilight breeze had voiced. A youth and maiden, young and beautiful, so runs the chatter of the woods and streams, wander in sadness along a zigzag trail, and, while he sighs, the maiden weeps and moans. There is no precedent, in all the forest lore, for this strange, futile quest of misery, this daily search for some new cause for tears where all the world is singing hymns of joy and praise.

And all the questions which the forest asked had found an echo in Cabanacte's soul. Why should Katonah gaze into his loving eyes with a glance which spoke of sorrow at her heart? What was there in all this wondrous paradise of earth which he, a youth of mighty prowess, could not lay at her dear feet? He would take her to the City of the Sun and teach her how to smile in gladness, how to make his home a joy. Did she fear the slavish drudgery of the women of her race and his? Oh, Sun in Heaven, could he but make her understand the broken Spanish of his clumsy tongue, he'd swear an oath to toil for her from year to year, to keep her slender hands at rest and hold her higher than the wives whose fate she feared!

Often would Cabanacte take Katonah's hand

in his, and, smiling up at her as she leaned against a tree, strive to make his scraps of Spanish aid the noble purpose of his heart. Now and then the knowledge which the girl had gained of French would serve Cabanacte's turn, and she would smile in comprehension of some word which he had voiced. After a time she found herself amused and interested by his earnest efforts to put her into touch with the ardent, uncomplicated longings of his simple soul. One day she had attempted to make answer to his question—clarified by the eloquence of primitive gestures—whether she would return with him to the City of the Sun. They had laughed aloud at the strange linguistic jumble which had ensued, and the spying gossips of the forest had sent forth the stirring rumor that the coy maiden had dried her tears and was at last worthy of the blessings of the spring. But hardly had the forest learned the story of Katonah's laughter, when the tears gleamed in her eyes and her whispered negative drove the smile from Cabanacte's face.

From this beginning, however, the youth and maiden had developed, through the long, aimless hours of their sylvan wanderings, a curious, amorphous *patois*, made up of a few words culled from the French and Spanish tongues and forced by Cabanacte to tell an ancient tale in a language

new to man. It brought renewed hope to the youth's sinking heart to find words which could drive, if only for a moment, the mournful gleam from Katonah's sad eyes, or, when fate was very kind, tempt a fleeting smile to her trembling lips.

But even after they had garnered a few useful words from Latin roots, there remained a heavy shadow upon the hearts of Katonah and her swain. Between them stood an elusive, intangible, but persistent and domineering, something, which restrained Cabanacte with its cruel grip, and often turned Katonah deaf to her lover's passionate words and blind to the adoring splendor which shone in his burning eyes. A savage maiden's foolish dream, a cherished memory which haunted her by day and crept into her sleep at night decreed that Cabanacte should woo her heart in vain and in a forest musical with love should grow sick with longing for the word that she would not speak. With gentle wiles and all the art his simple nature knew he laid before Katonah the treasures of devotion, and, 'though she smiled, and gazed into his eyes with tender gratitude, she waved them all aside and sat in silence in the moonlit night, recalling a pale, clear-cut face upon which she never hoped to look again.

It was long past midnight, and Cabanacte,

"A WHITE-FACED MAN PRESSING TO HIS BREAST A DARK-HAIRED MAIDEN."

weary of his vigil, and worn with the melancholy thoughts which oppressed him, leaned against a tree and dozed for a time while the maiden, reclining at his side, listened in her dreams to a mocking voice which had aforetime been music to her heart. The murmurs of the night had died away to silence as the moon fell toward the west, and the forest had settled itself for a nap before the dawn should hail the noisy day, when Katonah and Cabanacte were hurled to their feet by a crackling crash, which echoed through the protesting woods with a threatening insistence that stopped for an instant the beating of their hearts. Seizing the girl's cold hand, Cabanacte, glancing around him upon all sides with affrighted eyes, rushed wildly away from the oak-tree beneath which they had found rest, and strove, with a giant's strength, to win his way to the great river as a refuge from a wilderness in which evil spirits menaced them with ugly cries. Suddenly the stalwart youth paused in his mad career and drew the panting maiden close to his side. Far away between the trees a ghastly creature, a spectral man or monkey, crept and ran and bounded toward the shadow-haunted depths of the forest from which they fled. Knowing all the secrets of the woods, Cabanacte turned cold at the fleeting vision which had checked his wild flight, for never had he

seen beneath the moon so weird a sight. Almost before he could regain his breath it had come and gone, and the night was once again his lonely, silent friend.

Trembling from the cumulative horrors which had so suddenly beset their ears and eyes, Cabanacte and Katonah stole through the forest toward the river, which glimmered now and then between the trees. The giant's arm was thrown around Katonah's slender waist, and Cabanacte could feel the hurried beating of her aching heart as he pressed her to his side, as if to defend her from some new peril lurking in these treacherous wilds.

Suddenly, as they crept apprehensively toward the outskirts of the trees, the broad expanse of the Mississippi broke upon their sight, and, between their coigne of vantage and the river, they saw a tableau which emphasized their growing conviction that some strange enchantment was working wonders on the earth at night, to bind them together by ties woven in the land of ghosts.

Before their startled gaze stood a slender, white-faced man pressing to his breast a dark-haired maiden clad in black, and as they crouched beneath the underbrush they saw the brother of the moon bend down and kiss the spirit of the sun.

"'Tis Coyocop!" muttered Cabanacte, in a voice of wonder and adoration. "She has come to the forest to drive away the evil demons of the night!"

"Come!" whispered Katonah, urging her lover by the hand toward the woods from which they had just escaped—"come, Cabanacte! I love you! Do you understand my words? I love you, Cabanacte! Come!"

As the dusky giant, a willing captive led back to a joyous prison, followed Katonah toward the haunted glades, he knew that Coyocop had wrought a miracle and had banished from the forest the demons who had warred against his love.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE WEEPS AND FIGHTS

"I HAVE searched in all directions," remarked de Sancerre to Doña Julia, standing upon the river-bank and watching the early sunbeams as they greeted the rippling flood, "and I fear my captain's people did not abandon the canoe whose contents they left here as a gift from the good St. Maturin. But we are in good case! 'Tis a kindly stream, and its bosom will bear us gently to my friends. The walls of these frail huts will serve us well to form a raft."

The Spanish maiden watched the golden glory of the dawn, as it made a mirror of the stately stream, with eyes which glowed with happiness and peace. The dread of many perils which beset de Sancerre's mind found no reflection in the devout soul of Julia de Aquilar. Had not the saints wrought miracles to lead her from captivity? Weak, indeed, would be her faith if she doubted the kind persistence of their aid.

"'Tis but repaying what I owe, señora, if I should make you safe at last," continued de San-

cerre, musingly, taking Doña Julia's hand in his. "You saved my life. You have not told me how you knew they'd dressed my fish with poison from the woods."

"Ah, monsieur," sighed the girl, regretting that he had recalled the sorrows and dangers of the past, which seemed to her at this glad hour like the unreal horrors of a nightmare forever ended. "You must remember that I've spent a long, sad year in that City of the Sun. I'm quick to learn an alien tongue, and, without effort, I came to understand the language of the priests. The saints be praised, I'll know no more of it! And so I heard them plotting in the night outside my door to give you poison in the fish you ate. I prayed to Mother Mary to find a way—and, lo! my prayer was answered, for Noco came to me!"

"*Ma foi*, how much we owe to Noco!" exclaimed de Sancerre, scanning the river and the forest with searching eyes, as he turned to lead Doña Julia to the hut in which, through the aid of their aged companion, they were to break their fast. By means of the flintlock on his gun de Sancerre had kindled a fire, at which Noco had been cooking cakes of corn-meal, the odor from which now mingled with the bracing fragrance of the cool May morning.

As they entered the hut the girl uttered a cry

of dismay, and de Sancerre strode quickly to the prostrate form of their faithful counsellor and guide. Stretched before a snapping fire of twigs, with her last earthly task undone, lay Noco, dead, the grin and wrinkles smoothed from her old, brown face by the kindly hand of eternal sleep. The strain of the night's wild race had been too great for her brave heart, and, when called upon by the labor of the day, it had ceased to beat.

Doña Julia threw herself upon her knees beside the only friend she had known in her long captivity, and, with sobs and prayers, gave vent to the sorrow in her heart.

"*Nom de Dieu!* I think I loved that queer old hag!" murmured de Sancerre to himself, brushing a tear from his pale cheek, as he turned toward the wood-fire to resume the work from which Noco had been called by death. "I thought there was no limit to the vigor in her frame! Alas for her, I set the pace too hot!"

But there was no time for sighs and vain regrets. De Sancerre knew the woods too well to let his fire long toss the smoke between the fissures of the hut. Removing the corn-cakes from the blaze, he extinguished the flames at once, and urged Doña Julia to eat freely of a simple meal.

"Remember, señora," pleaded de Sancerre, earnestly, seeing that the sudden taking-off of their aged comrade had robbed the sorrowing

girl of all desire for food—"remember that the larder of our raft will be a crude affair. I know not when the luxury of corn-cakes will tempt our teeth again."

Doña Julia smiled sadly and renewed her efforts to do justice to a repast for which she had no heart.

"Think not, señor," she said, in Spanish, gazing at de Sancerre with eyes bright with pride and fortitude, "that I have learned no lessons from a year of peril and dismay. You knew me in the luxury of courts. Methinks you'll find me changed in many ways. I mourn old Noco. She saved me from despair. She hated Spaniards, but she worshipped me. Ah, señor, she had a loyal heart. May the saints be kind to her!"

"Amen!" exclaimed de Sancerre, fervently. "And now, señora, we have no time to lose! Untie the meal-bags in the corner there and bring the cords to me. I'll pull a hut to pieces and make a raft of logs upon the shore. For every mile the river puts between this spot and us, I'll vow a candle to St. Maturin."

Fastening a powder-horn and a bullet-pouch to his waist, to the deep resentment of his patrician rapier, de Sancerre, with gun in hand, hurried to the river-bank and chose a convenient spot from which to launch his treacherous craft upon a

kindly current flowing toward the camp of friends. As the hours passed by and his raft grew in size and strength, the depression which the death of Noco had cast upon de Sancerre's spirits stole away, and there were hope and cheer in the smiles with which he greeted Doña Julia when she came to him now and again from the hut with stout cords with which he spliced together the clumsy, stubborn logs of his rude boat. At short intervals he would abandon his task as a raft-builder to scan, with straining eyes, the broad expanse of river upon his left, or to listen breathlessly for sounds of menacing import in the forest at his back. But the sun had reached the zenith, his raft was nearly built, and de Sancerre could discover, neither upon flood nor land, aught to suggest that man-hunting man was stirring at high noon.

"*Courage*, mademoiselle," he cried, gayly, in his native tongue, as Doña Julia, pale and silent, approached him from the hut. "Another hour will find us voyageurs at last. We'll name our gallant little ship *La Coyocop!*"

"The saints forefend!" exclaimed the girl, smiling at his fancy. "'Twould bring disaster with it! 'Tis a heathen name! We'll christen our good raft in honor of the Virgin or the saints. They have been kind to us!"

"*Ma foi*, you speak the truth, *ma chère!* My

patron saint, the kindly Maturin, has saved me from all blunders for a day. If ever I should see a godly land again, I'll raise an altar to his memory."

The mocking undertone in de Sancerre's light, laughing voice recalled to Doña Julia the old days at Versailles when this same man, who, by a marvel wrought in Paradise, now stood beside her in a wilderness, had touched upon many things which she had held in high regard with the irreverent wit of a flippant tongue. But, on the instant, she felt that she had been unjust to de Sancerre in taking, even for a moment, the path along which memory led. The earnest, courageous, resourceful man at her side was not the debonair, satirical cavalier whom she had known at court. She had said to him that he would find a change in her, wrought by a year of danger and despair. She realized, through the quick intuitions of a loving heart, that during that same lapse of time the wild, stirring life which he had led had touched the nobler chords in the soul of de Sancerre, and had brought to view a manly earnestness and force which had stamped his mobile face with an imprint grateful to her eyes. At Versailles the courtier had fascinated her against her will. In the wilderness the man had won the unforced homage of her admiration. If, now and then, his tongue, by habit,

used flippant words to speak of mighty mysteries, the saints in heaven would forgive him this, for he had grown to be a man well worthy of their tender care.

The truth of this came to Doña Julia with renewed insistence as she and de Sancerre, having made the final preparations for their embarkation, knelt beside old Noco's corpse and, hand clasping hand, voiced a prayer for the repose of their faithful ally's soul.

"I dare not wait to give her burial," said de Sancerre, regretfully, as he and the girl left the hut, carrying to their raft what little corn-meal and gunpowder their frail craft allowed to them as cargo. "But well I know the saints will treat her well. Her claim upon them is the same as mine."

Doña Julia glanced up at de Sancerre, questioningly. He looked into her dark, earnest eyes with his heart in his, and answered her in Spanish:

"Old Noco worshipped you, señora—as I do! *Caramba!* What is that?"

The Frenchman stood motionless for a moment watching an object which broke the monotony of the river's broad expanse on their left. Presently he placed the keg of gunpowder, which he had been carrying, upon the shore, and, seizing the long, clumsy musket at his feet, examined the pan and hammer.

"What is it, señor?" asked the girl, calmly, glancing up the river at a bobbing, white speck far to the northward, and then looking into de Sancerre's pale, set face with eyes in which no terror gleamed.

"I hardly know, señora!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "But I fancy 'tis a thing which has no hold upon the saints!"

"You think it is—"

"I fear it is a war-canoe of white-robed devils, whose only claim to mercy is that they knew you were from God. But listen, *ma chère.* They must not see you here! There is no safety for us within the woods, for they would find my raft and track us quickly to the trees. The weird moon-magic of this snaphance gun must turn them from their course. Go back into the hut, and let their black eyes search for you in vain. With good St. Maturin's most timely gift I'll show them that a bullet is harder than their hearts."

"Ah, no—I cannot leave you now!" exclaimed the girl, shuddering at the prospect of a lonely vigil in the room where Noco lay.

"This is no place for you, señora," said de Sancerre, grimly, glancing again at the river, down which a large canoe, manned by ten stalwart sun-worshippers, which rose and fell upon the favoring tide, was approaching them with its

menace of death for de Sancerre and captivity for the girl. "Go to the hut at once! I shall not keep you waiting long. If the magic of my musket should not avail, we'll test the friendliness of yonder trees. But, still, I think my merry gun will drive the cowards back."

A moment later de Sancerre, humming snatches of the love-song which he had sung before the cabin of the goddess Coyocop, fingered his musket with impatience as he waited for the war-canoe to swing within easy range of a weapon with which he had had no long experience.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he muttered, as he raised the gun to his shoulder and then lowered it again to await a more favorable opportunity for his initial shot. "They make a gallant show! Their sun-baked brawn and muscle form a target which would rejoice the heart of a *coureur de bois*."

At that instant a cry of mingled rage and triumph arose from the paddlers as they discovered the picturesque figure, standing erect upon the bank in tattered velvets and toying with a curiously-shaped implement which had no terrors for their unsophisticated eyes.

"*Ma foi*, I think the time is ripe to do my little trick!" exclaimed de Sancerre, gayly, a smile of derision playing across his thin lips as the echo of his pursuers' shout of delight and anger came

back to him from the wall of forest trees. "My hand is steady, and my heart is light! You black-haired devil, drop that paddle!"

The mimic lightning made by flint and steel changed powder into noise, and as the river and the trees tossed back and forth the echoes of the musket's roar, a dusky athlete, dropping his paddle with a moan, toppled over dead into the shimmer of the sun-kissed waves.

"*Bien, ma petite!*" cried de Sancerre, patting his smoking gun with grateful hand. "The magic of the moon is working well to-day."

For a moment the horrified sun-worshippers lost control of their canoe, and it drifted jerkily toward the centre of the stream. Presently, recovering their wits, they plunged their paddles into the flood and held their responsive, graceful boat steadfast on the waves, seemingly in doubt as to the course they should pursue.

"Confound them!" muttered the Frenchman, who had leisurely recharged his musket. "'Tis strange how slow these bright-eyed devils are to learn! Do they want ten miracles, when one should well suffice? They seem to crave another message from the moon. If I could hit a moving boat-load, I'll have no trouble now! They're steadying my target—to the greater glory of my magic gun! Adieu—once more!"

Again the peaceful day protested loudly against

de Sancerre's noisy tricks, and the waters gained another victim from the worshippers of fire. There was no further hesitation aboard the great canoe. With paddles wielded by hands cold with fear, and arms bursting with the struggle to drive their boat beyond the fatal circle of a demon's witchery, the sun-worshippers frantically urged their primitive war-ship upward against the current of this treacherous river of death. Laying his faithful gun upon the bank, de Sancerre watched his retreating foes for a happy moment. Removing his torn bonnet with a flourish from his throbbing head, he made a stately bow, unheeded by the terrified canoemen, and cried gayly:

"*Adieu, messieurs!* They'll hear of you in France anon! And then beware! Adieu!"

With a light heart and feet which seemed to spurn the sloping bank, de Sancerre rushed toward the hut in which the woman of his love had been listening in terror to the scolding of his gun.

"Behold me, mademoiselle," he cried, jubilantly, as he drew the trembling girl to his breast, "a musketeer who wastes no powder upon his foes! I kiss your lips, my life and love! The prayers you sent to Heaven, I well know, have saved our lives again! Another kiss—and so we will embark."

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH DOÑA JULIA IS REMINDED OF THE PAST

It was night; black, oppressively damp, with thunder in the air and fitful lightning zigzagging across the sulky sky. With deep sighs, the forest prepared for the chastisement of the threatening storm. A sound like the sobbing of great trees followed the distant grumbling of dark, menacing clouds. The flying, climbing, crawling creatures of the woods and swamps and river-banks had heeded the warnings of the hour and had stolen to shelter from the wrath of the fickle spring-time.

The majestic Mississippi, swollen with the pride of power, flowed downward in silence through the gloom to throw its mighty arms around the islands near the gulf. Now and again its broad expanse would reflect for an instant the lightning's glare and then grow blacker than before, as if it repented of its recognition of the storm. Presently great drops of water pelted the bosom of the stream, and far to the westward the forest cried out

against the sudden impact of the resounding rain.

For many hours de Sancerre had been guiding his raft with an improvised paddle, the blade of which he had made from the wood of a powder-keg, and the long afternoon, when it had run its course, had left the adventurers nearer to the gulf by many weary miles than they had been at embarkation. Worthy of the trust which the dauntless Frenchman had placed in it, the hospitable stream had gently carried de Sancerre's raft down the watery pathway along which Sieur de la Salle had found the road to disaster and immortality.

An hour before sunset, however, misfortune, in defiance of the saintly name which Doña Julia had bestowed upon their primitive vessel, had overtaken the fugitives. Several logs, disaffected through the treachery of rotten cord, had broken away from the sides. Fearing the complete disintegration of his raft, de Sancerre had, with some difficulty, succeeded in making a landing and in removing his precious gun and stores to the shelter of the underbrush. He had hardly completed his task, and drawn his unreliable craft up to a safe mooring upon the shore, when the unwelcome storm had begun to fulfil its threats.

"I fear," exclaimed de Sancerre, drawing Doña

Julia close to his side, as they strove to shelter themselves from the rain beneath the overhanging bushes on the river-bank—"I fear our supper will be cold and wet to-night. I now begin to understand just why those white-robed children of the sun should worship fire. You tremble, *ma chère*. Tell me, are you cold?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Doña Julia, her face close to his to defeat the uproar of the rain. "The storm will pass. Ah, señor, what cause we have for gratitude!"

Somewhere in the forest at their backs the lightning struck a tree and their eyes rested for an instant upon a river made of flames, which a crash of angry thunder extinguished at their birth.

"Mother Mary, save us!" exclaimed the girl, while the hand which de Sancerre held trembled for an instant in his grasp.

"The worst has passed, sweetheart," he murmured, reassuringly, bending down until his lips touched hers. "Listen! The rain falls lighter upon the leaves above us now. These sudden storms in southern lands are like the—"

"Si, señor?"

"Like the anger of a Spaniard, I had said," confessed de Sancerre.

"Mayhap," murmured the girl, her eyes meeting his despite the blackness of the gloom.

"And think you, sir, they're like a Spaniard's love?"

"*Ma foi*, how can I tell?" he cried, laughingly. "You, señora, must guide me to the truth. But listen!" he went on, his voice growing earnest, as, forgetful for the moment of the storm and perils of the night, he gazed down upon the upturned face of a maiden who had shown to him the unsuspected depths of his own heart, "if your love for me is but a passing fancy, born of solitude and taught to speak by chance, I beg of you to pray the saints that I may die tonight. To live to lose your love— I'd choose a thousand deaths instead!"

In the girl's dark eyes de Sancerre could see a protest growing as he spoke.

"Nay, señor," she murmured, turning her gaze from his to watch the distant lightning as it flashed across the waters from the black clouds which covered the storm's retreat. "My life has been so strange I fear I may not speak as other maidens would. But why should I not confess the truth? My love for you is not a forest growth. The saints forgive me, I loved you at Versailles! If in this awful wilderness you're dearer to my heart than when, at court, you hurt my pride and showed my heart itself, 'tis not my fickleness which is at fault. I've loved none other, señor, in my life."

"You were betrothed!" exclaimed de Sancerre, impulsively, a man rather than a courtier at the moment.

"'Tis a story for another hour than this," said Doña Julia, softly. "Don Josef! Mother Mary be good to him! I always hated him, señor—although my hand was his. But look how the moon breaks through above those clouds! The storm is over, and the night grows clear. Shall we launch our raft again? I fear the forest, señor, more than yonder stream."

"Nay, I dare not float at night, *ma chère*," answered de Sancerre, smoothing the raven hair from her white forehead as her head rested upon his shoulder, and they watched the fickle night change its garb of black, fringed with fire, for the silvery costume vouchsafed by the full moon. "I fear I might steal past my captain in the dark."

Suddenly he pressed her face, splendid in its beauty as the moon caressed it, to his breast, while he gazed across his shoulder at the dripping forest with eyes large with sudden fear.

"God in heaven! There it comes again!"

Against his will, the words forced themselves from de Sancerre's parched lips.

"What is it, señor?" whispered Doña Julia, trembling at the horror in his voice.

"A white, misshapen thing," he muttered,

hoarsely. "I've seen it once before. It lies upon the ground beneath a tree."

They neither moved nor spoke for a long moment. De Sancerre strove in vain to rouse the mocking sceptic in his mind. Son of a superstitious age, he could not conquer the idea that he was haunted in the wilds by the lover of this girl, whom he had slain. Presently, as he still watched the white blotch beneath the weeping tree, his will regained its strength and he exclaimed:

"Sit here, señora. I'll go to it!"

He sprang to his feet, and, on the instant, Doña Julia stood by his side, while her gaze followed his toward the spectral outlines of an out-stretched man, motionless and ghastly beneath the moon.

"The saints protect us! You shall not go alone!" exclaimed the girl, putting an icy hand into de Sancerre's grasp and taking a firm step toward the mystery which tested the courage of her soul.

"You must not come with me, señora," cried de Sancerre, budging not an inch. "From where you stand your eyes can follow me. I shall return at once."

Releasing her hand, the Frenchman sprang forward, and in another moment stood gazing down at the almost naked body of a man whose soul at that very instant had passed from this

world to the next. In death the thin, drawn face regained the lines of youth, but on the head the hair was white, and on his chin a tuft of beard gleamed like silver in the moonlight. There was no flesh upon his bones. The night wind stirred the rags still clinging to his frame and tossed an oil-skin bag, fastened by a string around his neck, across his chest. A crucifix in miniature rested at that instant just above his heart.

"*Nom de Dieu*, it is a Spaniard—but not the ghost of him I slew!" exclaimed de Sancerre, breaking away from the horrid spectacle to return to Doña Julia. He had no need to go, for the girl was at his side, gazing down at the corpse with horror-stricken eyes.

"'Tis Juan Rodriquez!" she exclaimed, in a tone which voiced a conflict of emotions. "He goes to God with black, foul crimes upon his soul!"

"Who was this man, señora?" asked de Sancerre in amazement, drawing the girl to one side out of the insistent glare from the shrivelled corpse.

"An evil, treacherous creature, señor, who served my father as a scribe. I thought that he had perished with the others in the ship. I spoke his name to-day, when I told you the story of my father's awful fate. From the moment of my father's fall, until I found myself within the

City of the Sun, my memory is dumb. That was a year ago and more. The man who's lying there has suffered torments, señor, before his time was ripe."

"He'd lost his reason and become a beast," exclaimed de Sancerre, shortly. "But still he was from Europe, and has a claim upon us! I'll get my paddle and scratch a hole to hide him from the wolves. And then I'll say a prayer, and let him rest in peace."

"He was a murderer!" gasped the girl, trembling with cold as the rising breeze forced her damp garments against her weary limbs.

"*Ma foi*, if that is so, our prayers are little worth. But come, *chérie*, there is less wind beneath this hill. I will return and throw some earth above those bones. If that white fragment of a wicked man had murdered all my kin, I would not leave him there uncovered for all time. He came from lands we know—and so I'll treat him well! God, how I shall welcome the sight of de la Salle!"

With quick sympathy the girl put her hand upon de Sancerre's arm as they turned their faces toward the glimmering flood.

"A woman is so useless, señor!" she exclaimed, "I can do naught but pray! But show me how I best may aid you now. I will try so hard!"

"You know not what you say, señora!" cried

de Sancerre in Spanish, clasping the cold hand resting upon his arm as he led her toward the river. "Useless, quotha? Is a woman useless who teaches a wayward, rebellious, mocking heart the peace and glory of true love? I say to you, my Julia, that as Mother Mary is greater than the saints, so is a good woman better than the best of men."

Then he added, smiling gayly as his happy eyes met her earnest gaze, and changing his tongue to French: "Not, *chérie*, that I am the best of men!"

"You are to me! Is not that enough?" she murmured, in a tone which made sweet music to his ears.

A half an hour had passed and de Sancerre had returned to the girl from his grewsome task as a grave-digger. The awful fate of the murderer to whom he had given hasty burial depressed his spirits, for the dead man had borne upon his emaciated frame the marks of his long year of misery, a year during which he had wandered through the wilds in a great circle, until hunger and exposure had made him a mad, crawling animal, too long despised by death itself.

"There were papers in this oil-skin bag," remarked de Sancerre, throwing himself wearily upon the bank beside Doña Julia. "As he was secretary to your father, I thought it best to

examine what he had kept so safe upon his breast. It was not wrong, *ma chère?*"

The girl's face was even paler than its wont was, as she met her lover's questioning eyes. Her lips trembled slightly as she said:

"He boasted once, upon our vessel's deck, that he'd be master when we reached New Spain. Our king had granted lands and silver mines in Mexico to my dear father, rewarding him for his success in France. 'Tis possible—"

An exclamation uttered by de Sancerre interrupted Doña Julia's surmise. The Frenchman had been examining two imposing parchments by the clear light of the full moon.

"Your father's scribe, señora, was a man of fertile mind. King Charles of Spain has made two grants covering the same ground, one to his 'dear, beloved son in Christ, Don Rodrigo de Aquilar,' and the other to his 'dear, beloved son in Christ, Don Juan Rodriquez.' 'Tis clear enough that one of these is forged, but, for my life, I could not pick the honest parchment from the false. Why yonder villain kept them both, I do not understand."

"I think I know," mused the girl, in a weary voice. "He thought less of robbery than how to make me his. He would have torn this skilful counterfeit into a thousand bits had I been kind to him."

"*Nom de Dieu!* He dared to—"

Doña Julia glanced chidingly at the impetuous Frenchman.

"You spoke not harshly of him when I told you of his awful crimes," she said, while her hand crept shyly into de Sancerre's. "Is he less worthy of your leniency because he schemed to win the hand you hold?"

"'Tis selfishness, I know," said de Sancerre, thoughtfully, gazing contentedly into the dark eyes which met his. "I cared but little that he'd killed some man I never knew, but if he loved you, señora, I'm glad he died the death!" Seizing the forged parchment upon his lap, the Frenchman tore it to pieces and scattered the fragments upon the ground. Then he replaced the genuine grant in the oil-skin bag and fastened it to his sword-belt.

"I must repair my raft, *ma chère*," he said to the girl a moment later, bending down to kiss her cheek, cold and smooth and white. "You will forgive me, sweetheart, for loving you so well?"

Not far away the moonlight, falling in soft radiance between the trees, had thrown upon a rough grave, newly-made, the shadow of a cross.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH ST. EUSTACE IS KIND TO DE SANCERRE

Overlooking the waters of the great river, as they met and mingled with the waves of a lonely sea, stood a wooden column beside a wooden cross. Almost hidden by the shadow of the pompous pillar, the cross, unmarked by hand of man, made no open claim to power, but awaited patiently the outcome of the years. Upon the column had been inscribed the words:

Louis le Grand, Roy de France et de Navarre, règne; le Neuvième Avril, 1682.

Now and then the King's Column would appear to hold converse with the Cross of Christ, for it was a weary vigil which they kept, and the lofty pillar, haughtily displaying the arms of France, was forced, from very loneliness, to recognize the humble emblem at its base.

Through long, sunny days and soft, moonlit nights the salt breeze from the sea heard the royal column boasting to the lowly cross. By virtue of the legend upon its breast, said the

King's Pillar, a great monarch had gained a vast domain. Savannas, forests, prairies, deserts, rivers, lakes, and mountains, forming a gigantic province, had become, through a word uttered by a great explorer, the property of him whose name the wooden column bore. Through all the oncoming ages, the King's Pillar asserted, Louis le Grand, Roy de France et de Navarre, and his posterity, would own the fair lands through which a mighty river and its tributaries flowed. It was not to be wondered at that the stately column grew vain with the grandeur of its mission upon earth, and even garrulous at times, as it described to the insignificant cross the splendor of the dreams which a glowing future vouchsafed to it.

The Cross of Christ would listen in silence to the mouthings of the Royal Claimant, gazing further into the future, with a clearer vision than the proud pillar, whose words were those of men blinded by the intoxication of transient power. The unpretentious cross could well afford to indulge in the luxury of silence. Since it had first become a symbol of the power which is begotten by the teachings of humility and love, it had heard, a thousand times, the boastful words of monarchs swollen with the glory of ephemeral success. It had seen emperors and kings seizing lands and peoples to hold them in subjection

until time should be no more. But the centuries had come and gone, and the banners of earthly kings, rising and falling, had pressed onward and been driven back. Only the cross, emblem of peace on earth and good will to men, had, through those same ages, steadily enlarged the dominion over which its gentle rule prevailed. Carried forward often by fanatics and made to serve the ends of cruel hearts, it was, in spite of all the errors of its followers, slowly but surely receiving the earth for its heritage and mankind as the reward of its benignity.

One afternoon, late in the month of May, a man, pale, dejected, moving with the heavy step of one who had undergone great bodily fatigue, led a maiden, upon whose white face lay the shadow of a weariness against which youth could not prevail, toward the King's Column. Removing his bonnet from a head grown gray from recent hardships, the man, releasing the girl's hand, bent a knee before the proud emblem of his sovereign. At the same moment the maiden knelt down before the cross, and, weeping softly, breathed a prayer to a Mother whose Son had died for men.

Presently the girl arose and, followed by him who had paid his tribute to the fleeting power of kings, skirted the royal column, and seated herself upon a mound of sand from which she

could sweep, with her dark, mournful eyes, the expanse of a gulf new to the keel of ships. Stretching before her as if it knew no bounds lay a great water, an awful waste of sun-kissed, dancing waves, whose glittering splendor brought no solace to her heavy heart.

"It is a mystery which I cannot fathom," said de Sancerre, mournfully, throwing himself down by Doña Julia's side and gazing up at her sad, sweet face with eyes heavy from a disappointment which had crushed, for the time being, the fond hopes which had inspired him through long days of labor and nights of wakeful vigilance. "The good faith of the stern, upright de la Salle I cannot doubt. He would jeopardize his life, and all his mighty projects, to rescue a comrade to whom his word was pledged. We must have passed him somewhere in the twilight of the dawn or when I used the sunset's glow too long."

"What seemeth best to do, señor?" asked the girl, turning her gaze from the cruel sea to look into the face of a man upon whose courage and resourcefulness she had good reason to rely.

"*Ma foi*, I hardly know," muttered the Frenchman, looking about him upon the scattered remnants of de la Salle's encampment. "My captain may return—but 'twill be a weary while ere he comes back. A year, at least, must pass before he reaches here again. We stand in no

great danger from starvation, but 'tis a lonely shore. I thought to lead you from captivity, and, lo! I've merely changed your cabin-prison to a sandy jail! I fear St. Maturin has turned his face from me!"

"Be not cast down, señor," whispered Doña Julia, in her native tongue. "It cannot be that Mother Mary, who has been most kind to us, will leave us here to die."

"'Twould be unreasonable," exclaimed de Sancerre, almost petulantly. Then he went on, making an effort at cheerfulness. "But, for the present, we have no cause to lose all hope. This desert shore seems safe from savage men. My musket there will gain us meat enough, and in the forest there are fruits and berries fit for royal boards. In sooth, 'le Roy de France et de Navarre' has won a kingdom rich in all good things."

"We're safe from savage men, you say, señor," remarked Doña Julia, musingly, casting a meaning glance behind her at the silent woods. "I fear you do not understand the nation which we have defied." She smiled sadly as she went on: "You have abducted Coyocop, a goddess sent from heaven to make their people great. Although your musket filled them with dismay, they'll follow us."

The lines of care upon de Sancerre's drawn

face grew deeper as he listened thoughtfully to the girl's words.

"We've left no trail," he mused, gazing longingly at the horizon where the sea-line met the sky. "They're keen as woodsmen, but the river tells no tales. But, mayhap, you are right! You've known them long and heard the sun-priests talk. And if the worst should come, *ma chère*, I'd die for you with sword and gun in hand beneath the blazoned arms of France. 'Twould be a fitting ending for a count of Languedoc."

"Speak not so sadly, señor," exclaimed Doña Julia, placing a gentle hand upon his shoulder and looking into his face with courageous, hopeful eyes. "I sought not to dishearten you, but 'tis well for you to know the truth. To linger where we are is far from safe."

"That may be so," admitted de Sancerre, reflectively, as he examined the lock of his musket and then stood erect to cast a searching glance across sea and land. The restless billows of the gulf, the marshy coast, the islands at the river's mouth, and the grim forest overlooking the waters, formed a picture which human gaze had seldom swept. At this moment the outlook held no menace to the eyes or ears of de Sancerre. "To linger where we are, señora, may not be safe," he remarked, as he reseated himself and

took her hand in his, "but where 'tis best to go I hardly know. Our raft will not float up-stream, and we cannot put to sea. We have not much to choose! Between this hillock and the next there can be no great difference in the perils which surround us. And, somehow, señora, I feel nearer to my captain with the arms of France above my head."

Doña Julia pressed de Sancerre's hand and her quick sympathy shone in her dark eyes.

"Your captain, señor—you loved him?"

"De la Salle? I know not that I loved him. But I would have followed him to hell! There is a grandeur in my captain's soul which draws to him the little men and makes them great. Aye, señora, by all succeeding ages the name of him who raised this wooden column, against which we lean, in honor must be held! The deeds of de la Salle shall live, when the feats of countless noisy boasters are forgotten. But, that I loved this mighty leader I cannot say. I've served in Europe under lesser men than de la Salle, who led me by the heart; while he, methinks, appeals but to my head. He rules us not with velvet, but with steel, this dauntless captain, upon whose martial figure I would that I might gaze. And that is best, in such a land as this! Followed by red-men and wild, border outlaws, he could not hold them should he smile

and scrape. And, at the best, he cannot trust his men. They grumble at their captain, because he has no weakness in their eyes."

De Sancerre's long speech, to which Doña Julia had listened with forced attention, had changed the melancholy current of his thoughts and restored the lines of firmness to his mouth, the light of courage to his eyes. The memory of the bold adventurer under whom he had served for many months, and the inspiring legend which he had read and reread upon the column at his back, had revived the martial spirit in his impressionable soul, and his face and voice no longer bore evidence of the bitter disappointment which had driven him to the verge of despair when he had made the discovery that Sieur de la Salle had abandoned his camp at the Mississippi's mouth. With gun in hand, the Frenchman stood erect.

"Listen, *ma chère*, for I crave your counsel and advice," he said, gazing down at Doña Julia. "We may be here for months before we find a means of rescue, either by land or sea. We're worn with sleeplessness and toil, but, more than this, our bodies crave strong food. We've eaten meal and berries until I dream of Vatel when I doze — great Condé's cook, who killed himself because a dish was spoiled. My gun could add a fat wild-turkey to our larder; but the point

is this: the musket's noise might lead our dusky enemies to seek us here. I feared not their persistence 'til you spoke of it. This column and the arms it bears would make no great impression upon our foes."

"Our only hope must lie in yonder cross," murmured Doña Julia, devoutly. Then she gazed upward at the thin, white face of a man who might well call himself at this moment "a splinter from a moonbeam," so thin and white he looked. The horror of her situation, should her brave protector fall sick from lack of nourishing food, forced itself impressively upon her mind.

"'Twill do no harm, señor," she went on, "for you to snap your gun. In any case, our enemies, if they are still upon our track, would find us here, and if they hear your musket's loud report, 'twill check them for a time. They'll think the woods are haunted with demons threatening them."

"*Ma foi*, they would be, had I the magic which I claim!" exclaimed de Sancerre, examining carefully the priming of his gun. "I think, señora, that what you say is true. If those brown devils are now upon our trail, our silence cannot save us. St. Eustace be my guide! We'll break our fast at sunset, sweetheart, upon a bit of meat. I'll not go out of sight. I've wasted too much

time, for we must choose a lodging for the night before the dark has come."

Reinvigorated in mind and body, de Sancerre descended the hillock from which the King's Column and the Cross of Christ looked down upon an empire over which the reign of the proud pillar was not destined to endure. With eyes raised to heaven, Doña Julia knelt before the humble emblem of her faith, and besought the saints to guard her champion from the perils which might at this moment beset his steps. Then she arose, and, leaning against the wooden monument, watched, with ever-growing interest, the versatile Frenchman's efforts to satisfy his craving for a more nourishing diet than his labors as a raftsman had permitted him to gain.

"*Peste!*" muttered de Sancerre, as he made his way through the long grass toward the forest trees, "this musket is heavier by many pounds than when the good St. Maturin turned my footsteps toward it. Unless your bullet, *ma petite*, should find its way to yonder sleek, but most unsuspicious, banquet, I fear you'll grow too weighty for my hands. *Laude et jubilate!* The bird is mine!"

De Sancerre turned and waved his ragged bonnet toward Doña Julia, who had witnessed the success of his shot, and then, leisurely reloading his musket, made his way toward the precious

trophy of his marksmanship. Suddenly he stood stock-still, his head thrown back, and his eyes staring at the forest in amazement. As if in answer to his gun's report, there came from the distant trees the echo of a musket-shot, which thrilled the soul of the startled Frenchman with mingled hope and fear.

"St. Maturin help me!" he exclaimed, in a voice suggesting a parched throat. "Is it friend or foe? I thought, *ma petite*, that you had no kinsman within the radius of many miles."

Striving by gestures to urge Doña Julia to conceal herself behind the King's Column, de Sancerre, with his musket at his shoulder, stretched himself at full length upon the grass, and, while his heart beat with suffocating rapidity, watched with straining eyes a grove of leafy trees from which the ominous reply to his gun had been made. Suddenly in front of him, almost within a stone's-throw, stood a tall, slender man, clad in the unseasonable costume of a Canadian *coureur de bois*. He carried a smoking musket in his hand. At his belt dangled a hatchet, a bullet-pouch, and a bag of tobacco. In a leather case at his neck hung his only permanent friend, his pipe.

"St. Maturin be praised!" cried de Sancerre, springing to his feet and raising his musket to arm's-length above his head. "'Tis that

rebellious rascal, Jacques Barbier! *Bienvenue*, Jacques! In the name of all the saints at once, how came you here?"

"Gar!" exclaimed the lawless runner-of-the-woods, throwing himself at full length upon the grass, and gazing up at de Sancerre with a smile, hard to analyze, upon his sun-burned, handsome, self-willed face. "It is Monsieur le Comte! My eyes are quick, monsieur. I do not wonder that you stayed behind."

Displaying his white teeth mischievously, the *coureur de bois*, a deserter from de la Salle's band of Indians and outcasts, waved a brown hand toward the King's Column.

Hot with anger at the insolence of the outlaw though he was, de Sancerre controlled his temper and said calmly, but in a tone of voice which had a restraining effect upon the bushranger:

"'Tis a long story, Jacques! I found a Spanish princess in a city built by devils. You've come to me in time to take a hand in a merry little war between the sun and moon. No, Jacques! You're wrong. I can read your mind at once. You think the wilderness has robbed me of my wits. But come! There is much to do, and I must question you about my captain and why I find you here alone. Bring that nut-fattened turkey up the hill, and we will work and talk and make what plans we may."

The outlaw, whose life had been one long protest against the authority of other men, arose from the ground, with lazy nonchalance, and gazed down at the wild-fowl which de Sancerre had shot. The Frenchman had turned away and was breaking his path through the long, dry grass toward the crest of the hill, from which Doña Julia had been watching a rencontre the outcome of which she had no way of predicting.

Jacques Barbier gazed alternately upward at the retreating figure of de Sancerre and downward at the wild turkey at his feet. Then, with a protesting smile upon his symmetrical, but half-savage, face, he bent down and raised the fat fowl to his shoulder and followed Monsieur le Comte toward the King's Column. De Sancerre had gained for a time—short or long, as the case might be—an ally whose woodcraft was as brilliant as his lawlessness was incorrigible.

"*Jubilate, señora,*" cried the count, as he approached Doña Julia. "The saints have been more than kind! They have filled our larder, doubled our fighting force, and made me younger by ten years. But, señora, 'tis not a pious friend whom I have found! This same Jacques Barbier's a devil, in his way. Wear this, my dagger, at your waist, *ma chère!* I know that you dare use it, should the need arise."

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH DE SANCERRE'S ISLAND IS BESIEGED

"*Pardieu, Monsieur le Comte,* I'll ne'er forget the scene!" remarked Jacques Barbier, puffing his pipe and lazily watching the smoke as the evening breeze tore it into shreds. Nearly a month had passed since the *coureur de bois*, with a wild turkey, had helped to make a single shot from de Sancerre's musket worth its expenditure of powder and ball. During that period, Jacques Barbier, obedient, docile, knowing every secret of the woods and waters, had been a source of never-ending comfort to the French count. With a tactfulness which he would have been incompetent to employ a year before this crisis, de Sancerre had attached the Canadian youth to his fortunes without arousing the restless, reckless spirit of revolt which made a *coureur de bois*, in those wild times, an unreliable ally and a mutinous subordinate.

There were, however, other things besides de Sancerre's diplomacy which had tended to keep Jacques Barbier contented with his lot for the

time being. The necessity for obtaining food without betraying their hiding-place to savage men, hot upon their trail, had taxed the Canadian's ingenuity and had aroused his pride as a woodsman. He had listened with close attention to de Sancerre's tale, and had agreed with Doña Julia that the sun-worshippers would not abandon the quest of their goddess as long as their resources for her pursuit held out. By Barbier's advice and assistance, de Sancerre had erected two small huts upon an insignificant island in the western branch of the great river's mouth, and here they had passed several weeks in peace and plenty, weeks which had restored brilliancy to Doña Julia's eyes and color to her cheeks and lips, while they had revived her champion's spirits and had brought back mincing lightness to his step and gayety to his ready smile.

Their retreat had not been invaded by the degenerate savages along the river-banks. Now and then they would catch a glimpse upon the river of a distant canoe in which copper-colored sportsmen were attempting to lure the ugly catfish from the muddy waters of the turgid stream, and once, far to the northward, they observed a war-canoe putting out from the eastern shore and urged up-stream by paddles which glistened in the sunlight.

Once in awhile, Jacques Barbier would return

from the forest, laden with game-birds, to tell a highly-colored story of redmen whose keen eyes he had avoided through the potency of his marvellous woodcraft. But the month of June, known to the sun-worshippers as the moon of watermelons, had reached a ripe age, and the island's refugees found themselves well-housed, well-fed, and free, as far as they could observe, from the machinations of cruel foes. Sanguine by temperament and easily influenced by his environment, de Sancerre had put himself into opposition to the belief, held by Doña Julia and Jacques Barbier, that the sun-priests and their tools would descend to the gulf, by land or water, in search of Coyocop. He had eliminated from his mind the thought of peril at his back and had turned his face toward the sea, thinking only of succor from a passing ship.

It was with the hope that European sailors would come to them from the gulf that de Sancerre had fastened a piece of white canvas, which he had found among the *débris* of de la Salle's encampment, to the top of the King's Column. From where he sat at twilight in front of the rude hut occupied by Jacques Barbier and himself, de Sancerre could look across the narrow streak of water between his island and the mainland and see his signal of distress flapping lazily in the evening breeze. Now and then the bright,

restless eyes of the *coureur de bois* would rest protestingly upon the white flag. To his mind, the rag was more likely to bring upon them enemies from the woods than friends from the lonely sea. Jacques Barbier hated the ocean with an intensity only equalled by the fervor of his love for the forest wilds.

On the evening to which reference is now made, the *coureur de bois* had grown unwontedly loquacious, as he smoked his evening pipe, and glanced alternately at Doña Julia and de Sancerre, as, hand clasped in hand, they listened to the usually taciturn Canadian's account of the ceremonies attending the erection of the King's Column and the Cross of Christ.

"*Pardieu*, Monsieur le Comte, I'll ne'er forget the scene! We, that is your countrymen and mine, were mustered under arms, while behind us stood the Mohicans and Abenakis, with the squaws and pappooses whom they had brought with them to make trouble for us all. Père Membré, in full canonicals, looking like a saint just come to earth from Paradise, intoned a Latin chant. Then we all raised our voices and sang a hymn:

"'The banners of Heaven's King advance,
The mystery of the Cross shines forth.'

The Mohicans and Abenakis grunted with excitement and the pappooses yelled. '*Vive le Roi!*'

we shouted, to drown their clatter, and then your captain—may the devil fly away with his surly tongue!—raised his voice and claimed for the King of France and Navarre possession of 'this country of Louisiana'—with the right to put a tax upon every peltry which we poor trappers take. Gar, it is no wonder, Monsieur le Comte, that we who risk our lives within the woods should feel small reverence for a king so far away, whose harsh enactments have made us outlaws in the land where we were born. Mayhap, monsieur, you have good cause to love the King of France! In that, you differ from Jacques Barbier."

Doña Julia felt de Sancerre's hand grow cold in hers and heard him mutter something beneath his breath, the burden of which she did not catch. The truth was that the random shot of the *coureur de bois* had touched the French count in a sensitive spot. What better reason had he for loyalty to the Tyrant of Versailles than this vagabond of the woods, who, even in the most remote corners of a trackless wilderness, still felt the sinister influence of a selfish despotism exercising a wide-spread cruelty begotten of egotism and bigotry? Had not de Sancerre known the fickleness of royal smiles and frowns, the ingratitude of a monarch who, at the instigation of a priesthood, could sacrifice a brave and loyal

subject without granting him a chance to speak a word in his own defence?

"In good sooth," murmured de Sancerre to himself, "his tongue has cut me deep! What cause have I to love the King of France? I knelt in homage at his column there, but methinks my knee and not my heart paid tribute to *le Grand Monarque!* Somehow, this mighty wilderness makes rebels of us all! *Ma foi*, Jacques Barbier," he cried aloud, "what is it that you see?"

The *coureur de bois* had sprung to his feet and was sweeping the shore of the main-land with a quick, piercing glance which cut through the darkness which the moon, soon to show itself in the east, had not yet overcome.

"Request the Princess"—the title by which Jacques Barbier designated Doña Julia de Aquilar—"request the Princess, Monsieur le Comte, to retire to her hut for the night! There are men stirring upon the further bank who are neither Quinipissas nor Tangibaos. I fear, monsieur, that you have underrated the persistence of your foes who make the sun their god. Unless I never knew the woods, there are stalwart strangers in the bushes over there. Go you, monsieur, and watch the river, while I keep an eye upon this bank. Gar, 'twill be a pretty fight, Monsieur le Comte! Your hand is steady?

Bien! The moon will soon be up. Keep close to earth when you have reached the river!"

"*Ma foi*, Jacques Barbier, I like the way you talk!" whispered de Sancerre. "But, tell me, we're short of bullets, are we not?"

"Humph!" grunted the Canadian, gruffly. "We've none to waste upon the waters or the trees, Monsieur le Comte! Bear that in mind."

"Tell me, señor," exclaimed Doña Julia, to whom Jacques Barbier's French *patois* was an unmeaning jumble of more or less unrecognizable words when he spoke rapidly: "Tell me, señor, has he seen the sun-priests on yonder shore?" Her hand was like a piece of ice in his clasp, as de Sancerre led the girl toward the hut.

"I hardly know, *ma chère*," answered her lover, frankly. "There are men stirring upon the bank, but I cannot believe that they are from the City of the Sun. But if they are, my sweetheart, there are those among them who will never look upon their mud-baked homes again! 'Tis strange how a fat larder restores the fighting spirit to a man. A month ago my stomach loathed a battle. At that time, all that it wanted was a bird. To-night, if you were far away, señora, I'd take rare pleasure in doing moon-tricks when the moon is full. And so adieu, my sweetheart," he whispered, pressing his lips to hers

ere she bent down to enter her rude cabin. "When you hear my musket speak, you'll know an enemy of yours has need of prayer."

It was not long after this that de Sancerre made good his boast, although Jacques Barbier began the battle of the night. The French count had dragged his musket and his crouching body through the long grass toward the eastern shore of the small island, and had taken one sweeping glance at the river, over which at that instant the risen moon had thrown a flood of silvery light, when behind him he heard the roar of the Canadian's deadly gun. But de Sancerre had no time to think of his faithful ally at that critical moment. Almost upon a line with the island, and coming straight toward it, two heavily manned war-canoes of the sun-worshippers rose and fell upon the moon-kissed flood. The imminence of his peril acted upon de Sancerre like a draught of rich, old wine.

"What reckless fools these be!" he exclaimed, taking careful aim at the nearest canoe, now within a hundred yards of his grass-grown shooting-box. "Be faithful, *ma petite!* The time has come again!"

The thunder of de Sancerre's gun chased the echoes from the musket of the *coureur de bois* across the glimmering flood.

"*Ma foi!*" muttered de Sancerre. "Saint

Maturin is wide awake to-night! That bullet did its work."

Reloading his musket with all possible speed, the Frenchman, with a grim smile upon his face, drew a bead upon the second canoe, which had now forged ahead of the boat-load upon which de Sancerre's fatal shot had exercised a demoralizing effect. Meanwhile, Jacques Barbier's gun had spoken twice, for he had learned to reload his weapon with a celerity only acquired after years of practice.

"Steady, now, *ma petite*," muttered de Sancerre. "You have a record to maintain. *Adieu, monsieur!*"

A paddle and its dusky wielder fell into the black-and-white flood, and a moment later the two canoes had retreated to mid-stream.

"Gar, you shoot well, Monsieur le Comte!" exclaimed Jacques Barbier, creeping to de Sancerre's side. "If our bullets could have children, we could hold this island for a year! There is no danger from the forest for a time; and, I think, those boats will not come near us for an hour at least. These be the demons from your City of the Sun?"

"There is no doubt about it!" exclaimed de Sancerre. "It must amaze them to meet so much moon-magic, although the moon is full. What think you, Jacques, will be their next attempt?"

"They'll hold aloof, Monsieur le Comte, until their courage rises or a cloud obstructs the moon. 'Tis best, I think, that we patrol our fort. You pace the island to the right. I'll meet you halfway round, and then return. Unless our bullets fly away too fast there is no danger—for this night at least."

"Think you, Jacques Barbier, they saw the maiden—Coyocop?"

"Gar, 'tis certain, is it not? Their bold attack by boat and shore was not the outcome of a clumsy chance. They knew that she was here, and thought that you could not defend the island on both sides. But this is not the time for talk, monsieur. *Marchons!*"

An hour passed by, and the island's sentinels could find neither upon land nor stream sure proof that the sun-worshippers meditated an immediate renewal of their attack.

"Tell me, señora," cried de Sancerre, abandoning his patrol for a time to have speech with Doña Julia—"tell me what it means! They found two guns awaiting them instead of one. But they have come in force by wood and stream. They have no skill in war, if this is all their fight."

"Be patient, señor, they will come again," remarked the Spanish maiden, unconsciously suggesting by her words the influence which de

Sancerre's mind held over hers. "They have concealed themselves, to talk of many things which worry them."

"*Par exemple?*" exclaimed de Sancerre, thrusting his hand through the opening to her hut, to clasp hers.

"They know that I am here."

"You feel sure of that?"

"Yes. But they will not return to-night—for all night long the moon will shine."

"*Pardieu*, I do not follow you, señora."

"'Tis clear to me," said the girl, firmly. "Somehow, I seem to read their minds, as if the saints were speaking to my soul. They fear that your white witchery, when the moon is full, is more fatal than they had dreamed. They will await the rising of their god, the sun, before they try to capture me again. Be convinced of this: they will attack you, señor, just at dawn. I know their hearts and habits well enough to feel assured that what I say is true. They are not cowards, but they dread the magic of your deadly guns."

"But listen, señora. I fought them in the sunlight once before. They know that *ma petite* can kill by day," argued de Sancerre, hoping against hope that, for the sake of their scanty store of bullets, the girl was right.

"Believe me, señor, that I read their evil

minds. They think their god, the sun, more powerful at dawn than later in the day. The Great Spirit, so the sun-priests say, is not unlike a man, and takes a long *siesta* at high noon. They have attacked you now at noon and in the night. They will not tempt your wizard gun again until their shining god is wide awake."

"*Ma foi*, *ma chère*, your woman's wit has wrought a miracle, I think!" exclaimed de Sancerre. "I owe an altar somewhere far from hence, if what you say is true. And so I'll leave you, sweetheart, for a time. I must have speech with Barbier."

"Welcome, monsieur," cried the *coureur de bois*, as the Count approached him from behind. "I've watched the shore until my eyes are hot, and cannot see a sign of living thing. The river and the woods suggest that we were scared by ghosts."

"Nay, Jacques, you'll find our foes were made of flesh and blood! They will return in force at dawn!" exclaimed de Sancerre, throwing himself upon the long grass at Barbier's side.

The *coureur de bois* glanced at the ragged, white-faced patrician at his side with a satirical gleam in his restless eyes.

"You've learned your woodcraft with great celerity, Monsieur le Comte," he exclaimed, sar-

castically. "Mayhap the saints have told you what would come to us."

De Sancerre smiled coldly. "'Tis neither woodcraft nor the saints to whom I owe my thanks, Jacques Barbier," he remarked, quietly. "I am a seer and prophet through the goddess Coyocop. And now, young man, I'll let you watch awhile, and get a wink of sleep. I'll need a steady hand at dawn. Arouse me in an hour, and I will take my turn at watching peaceful scenes. Good-night, Jacques Barbier. Bear this in mind! We'll have to fight an army when the sun comes up."

A moment later de Sancerre lay out-stretched beneath the moon in dreamless sleep, while the *coureur de bois*, pacing restlessly the little island, nursed his wounded pride, and wondered if the morning would teach him something new.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH THE GREAT SPIRIT COMES FROM THE SEA TO RECLAIM COYOCOP

Coyocop's prediction was fulfilled at dawn. The year which Doña Julia de Aquilar had passed in the City of the Sun had enabled her to read aright the minds of the sun-worshippers after their moonlit attack upon de Sancerre's island had been repulsed. They had awaited the coming of their gleaming god, and had been rewarded by a sunrise whose splendor should have filled their childish souls with love and peace. But the mounting orb of day was greeted by its idolaters not with gentle hymns of praise, but with wild, warlike shouts, that echoed from the woods and across the flood with a grim, menacing persistence that sent a chill through the hearts of a maiden and her lover, and caused a dare-devil from the northern woods to look with care to the priming of his gun.

For the first time since Jacques Barbier, in a fit of temper caused by some fancied slight put upon him by the haughty de la Salle, had desert-

ed the great explorer's party, trusting confidently to his own skill as a woodsman to carry him safely back to Canada, the *coureur de bois* had regretted, momentarily, his reckless self-confidence. Had he remained with his captain, he might have been, at this time, half-way up the river toward the forests which he knew and loved; and here he was, at the dawn of a day made to give joy to a runner of the woods, surrounded by gigantic, fierce-eyed warriors, already raising hoarse shouts of triumph for the easy victory which seemed to lie within their reach.

"Gar!" exclaimed Barbier, as he raised his gun to his shoulder. "Service with de la Salle was hard, but 'twas easier than death. But, then, 'tis time for me to die! When a wandering outcast from the Court of France comes here to tell me what will happen in the woods—and, *pardieu*, he told me true—there's nothing left in life for poor Jacques Barbier!"

A few moments before the *coureur de bois* had elevated his musket, to begin a battle against overwhelming odds, de Sancerre had said farewell to a heavy-eyed, pale-lipped maiden, who had spent the night in prayer, fearful of the peril which the dawn would bring to a brave knight-errant who had grown dearer to her loving heart with every day that had passed. Well Doña Julia knew that captivity, not death, would

be her lot should the sun-worshippers reach the island, but that they would grant mercy to de Sancerre she had no hope. The thought of life without the man whose love had come to her as the rarest gift which Heaven could bestow was a horror which drove the color from her face and robbed her voice of everything save sobs.

"Remember, sweetheart, if the worst should come to me," said de Sancerre, with forced calmness, bending down to press his cold lips to her trembling hand, "that your brave, earnest heart has taught me how to live and how to die. Pray to the Virgin, who holds you in her care, to keep me always worthy of your love, 'though death should come between us for a time. Adieu, *ma chère!* God grant 'tis *au revoir!*"

The girl clung to his hand, wet with her tears, and strove in vain to speak, to put into halting words the love and despair which filled her soul. For an instant her white face looked up at him from the entrance to the hut, and de Sancerre bent forward and kissed her hot, dry lips.

A moment later he had crawled through the tall grass toward the eastern shore of the island and lay watching, once again, the two war-canoes of the black-haired, black-eyed, black-hearted savages who had turned from their adoration of the sun to begin anew their devil's work.

Suddenly a shower of feathered, reed-made arrows whizzed above the gleaming waves, deadly from the speed with which long acacia bows endowed them.

"*Ma foi*, the sun-wasps begin to sting!" exclaimed de Sancerre. At that instant he heard Jacques Barbier's gun, warning the sun-worshippers' land-force not to launch a canoe from the shore nearest to the island.

The Count and the Canadian, an hour before sunrise, had divided the store of bullets which remained to them, and had found that only a dozen shots from each musket stood between them and certain death.

"I know how a miser feels as he counts his gold," soliloquized de Sancerre, as he aimed his gun at the canoe, from which a broadside of arrows had been launched at his coigne of vantage. "Here goes number one, *ma petite!* There are only eleven more to defend a Count of Languedoc from the life to come! *Bon matin, monsieur!*"

To de Sancerre's chagrin and dismay, the brawny, brown paddler at whom he had aimed his musket had defied moon-magic at the dawn of day. The Count's precious bullet had done no harm to the oncoming canoe, nor to the war-party which it held. Cold with the horrid possibilities opened up by his indifferent marksman-

ship, de Sancerre, with hands which trembled annoyingly, attempted to reload his gun in time to prevent the imminent landing of the howling bowmen. That his shot would have come too late the speed of the canoe made evident, when a crash, almost at his very ear, nearly deafened the astonished Frenchman for a time. Jacques Barbier, having checked momentarily by his marvellous skill with his musket the attack from the main-land, had come to de Sancerre's defence in the nick of time. But the *coureur de bois* paid dearly for the support that he had given to the unnerved Frenchman. An arrow, shot by a dusky warrior more daring than his companions, had made answer to Jacques Barbier's fatal bullet and had entered the Canadian's breast just below his dangling tobacco-pipe.

"Mother Mary, that is enough!" groaned the *coureur de bois*, writhing upon the tousled grass by his horrified comrade's side. "*Courage, Monsieur le Comte!* Let them have your charge! I have just life enough left to load my gun again. Wait! Your hand trembles! *Bien!* Fire!"

De Sancerre's musket roared once again and his bullet found its way to the heart of a foe.

"Take my gun, monsieur," gasped Barbier. "I made shift to load it—but, gar, this is death! Ugh!"

A hero at the end of his short, wild life, the *coureur de bois* lay dead upon the shore.

At that instant the waters of the gulf and the river's mouth vibrated with the thunder of an explosion which, to the ears of the startled sun-worshippers upon the main-land and in the crowded war-boats, sounded like moon-magic gone mad with victory.

"*Nom de Dieu*, it is the cannon of a ship or my ears are haunted by Jacques Barbier's gun!" exclaimed de Sancerre, eying the retreating canoes as he stealthily raised his head above the underbrush and then cast a searching glance toward the sun-kissed sea. To his amazement and joy, his gaze rested upon a clumsy carack, loaded deep, coming to anchor not half a mile below the island upon which he stood. A puff of smoke arose from the great ship's bow at that moment, and again the astonished woods and waters reverberated with an uproar new to the ears of a hundred terrified warriors, who had come forth to recover a goddess and had been met with the awful chiding of the Great Spirit, who had sent a mighty vessel, larger than their wildest dreams had known, to carry Coyocop back again to God.

With his heart throbbing with many varied emotions, de Sancerre had reluctantly turned his grateful eyes from the sea, no longer a lonely,

cruel waste of tossing waves, toward the forest to the westward, into which the land-forces of the disorganized sun-worshippers were scurrying in mad fear of an avenging deity, when he felt a light hand upon his arm, and, turning quickly, gazed down into the dark, glowing eyes of a maiden whose trust in the saints had not been betrayed.

"In the hut I knelt in prayer," whispered Doña Julia, from whose face shone the light of a soul that had known deep sorrow and great joy, "when I heard my father's voice, telling me that help was near. Oh, señor, the wonder of it all!"

"It looks to me a miracle, indeed!" exclaimed de Sancerre. "There seemed to be no hope when Barbier was hit! He died, señora, the death of a true man."

Hand in hand, they stood for a time gazing down at the brave, liberty-loving runner of the woods, whose clean-cut, handsome face had kept its firm, symmetrical outlines through the agony of sudden death.

"Give me back again my dagger, sweetheart," said de Sancerre, turning sadly away from a grim picture of manly vigor cut down in its youthful prime. "I did Jacques Barbier a cruel wrong! He was too brave a man to do a coward's deed!"

"They're manning a boat to come to us!"

"HE FELT A LIGHT HAND UPON HIS ARM, AND GAZED DOWN INTO THE DARK EYES OF THE MAIDEN."

exclaimed the Frenchman a moment later, as he and Doña Julia turned again to gaze at the great carack, rising and falling upon the early morning tide. "It is a Spanish vessel, sweetheart!"

"*Si*, señor. There is no doubt of that! I cannot read the flag she flies, but 'tis some Spanish merchant-man bound west for Mexico."

De Sancerre slipped an arm, covered with velvet rags, around the slender waist of the girl, whose sweet face had gained new beauty from the mighty miracle which the saints had wrought in her behalf.

"They heard our guns at dawn across the sea, and saw my canvas flapping in the breeze," he said, musingly. "At last, by chance, the King of France has done me a good turn! He owed me one, señora. My sword has served him well, but when it made a slip, which love itself forgave, he turned his face away, and left me, sweetheart, with no land to call my own!"

Doña Julia looked up at her lover with a bright smile upon her curving lips, and her eloquent eyes told of a joyful heart, as she said:

"If so my countrymen in yonder boat are kind enough to take us, señor, to the West, we'll find a province which belongs to me. If you will deign to make my realm the land of your adoption, I pledge my word to be a gracious queen."

Falling to one knee, with the airy grace of a

courtier who had never known the manners of the woods and wilds, de Sancerre pressed the girl's hand to his smiling lips.

"Here, within sight of a column bearing the arms of France and Navarre," he cried, gayly, "I forswear all allegiance to other kings than Love, and hereby pledge my life and heart and sword to the service of my queen, whose hand I kiss!"

The salt breeze from the playful sea, smiling beneath the bright June sun, brought to their ears at that moment the sound of a small boat scraping upon the beach, and the rumble of oars clattering against dry wood.

. . . . . .

The sun was sinking toward the West, and the King's Column, after a long interval of silence, spake complaining words to the Cross of Christ. "'Twill be more lonely for us now than heretofore," grumbled the tall pillar, above which a shred of soiled canvas hung, heavy and limp, flapping lazily now and again against the wooden sides of the royal herald. "In yonder ship, whose sails resemble golden wings against the background of the deep, a man and maiden, seemingly most worthy of the blessings of this realm of mine, have taken flight and treated me with strange ingratitude. I marvel that they

should in such wise spurn my royal master and the haughty arms of France."

The Cross of Christ said nothing to soothe the wounded pride of the pompous pillar, towering above the humble emblem of an all-conquering faith in the crimson light of the waning day. Mayhap the Cross had no time, at that sad moment, to give to happy lovers, sailing through the glowing twilight toward a land of peace and joy. At its base lay a newly-made grave, within which slept the body of a youth who had loved God's world and hated the tyranny of men.

THE END

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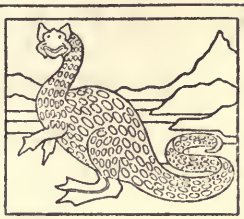

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